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Number 1
Fall 1997

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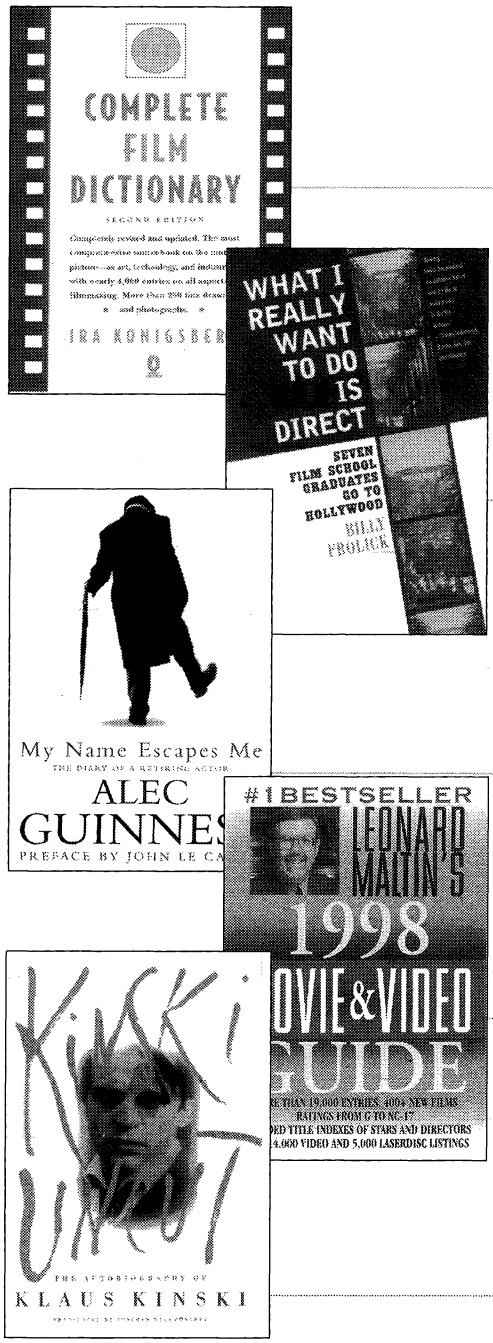


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Volume 51
Number 1
Fall 1997

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Printed in USA

Type
Irene Imfeld Graphic Design
Berkeley, CA

Printing
Allen Press, Lawrence, KS

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**Film Quarterly** (ISSN 0015-1386) is published quarterly by the University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720. Periodicals postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian GST #R122058662. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Film Quarterly, University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720.

Subscriptions are $25 per year for individuals, $58 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside the U.S., add $6 for postage. Single issues are $6.25 for individuals, $16 for institutions. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed.

Subscription requests and requests for advertising rate cards should be sent to the Journals Department, manuscript enquiries to the Editor, Film Quarterly, at the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720. Unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1994. ∞

Back issues subsequent to Volume 18 (1965-66) write to the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94720. ♻ This journal is printed on recycled paper. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors only.

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# ANTONIONI IN 1980

## AN INTERVIEW

*Seymour Chatman*

I recently unearthed the tape of an interview I had with Michelangelo Antonioni in November 1980, recorded as I was preparing my book, *Antonioni, or the Surface of the World.* Antonioni invited me to his beautiful apartment on the Tiber. He was warm, friendly, open, and always candid. The interview was partly in English and partly in Italian.[1] For this publication, Antonioni graciously allowed me to reproduce some of his own drawings and texts.

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SEYMOUR CHATMAN: *In your early, "apprentice" films of the 1950s (the documentaries, and* Cronaca di un amore, I vinti, La signora senza camelia, *and* Le amiche*) were you working within the genres or were you trying to work your way out of them? You wanted to make a film,* Cronaca di un amore, *so you made a* giallo, *a film noir.*

MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI: Yes, but it happened without my willing it; I just wanted to tell that story. I didn't want to demonstrate anything with my movies, you know . . . not to start from an idea and to explain to the audience that this is my idea, that I want to tell you this and this. I just wanted to tell a story and depict the emotions it contains.

*Was the story of* Cronaca *more familiar to the public than the kind of story told by your films of the 60s?*

What you're doing is making a critical analysis and asking my opinion about it. But I find it very difficult to respond because I scarcely know how to judge my films from a critical point of view. My films come from my emotions and correspond to a certain period of my life. Of course, behind my emotions there are experiences, ideas, thoughts, observations of reality, and political, social, philosophical, and moral convictions—everything!

*And aesthetic convictions?*

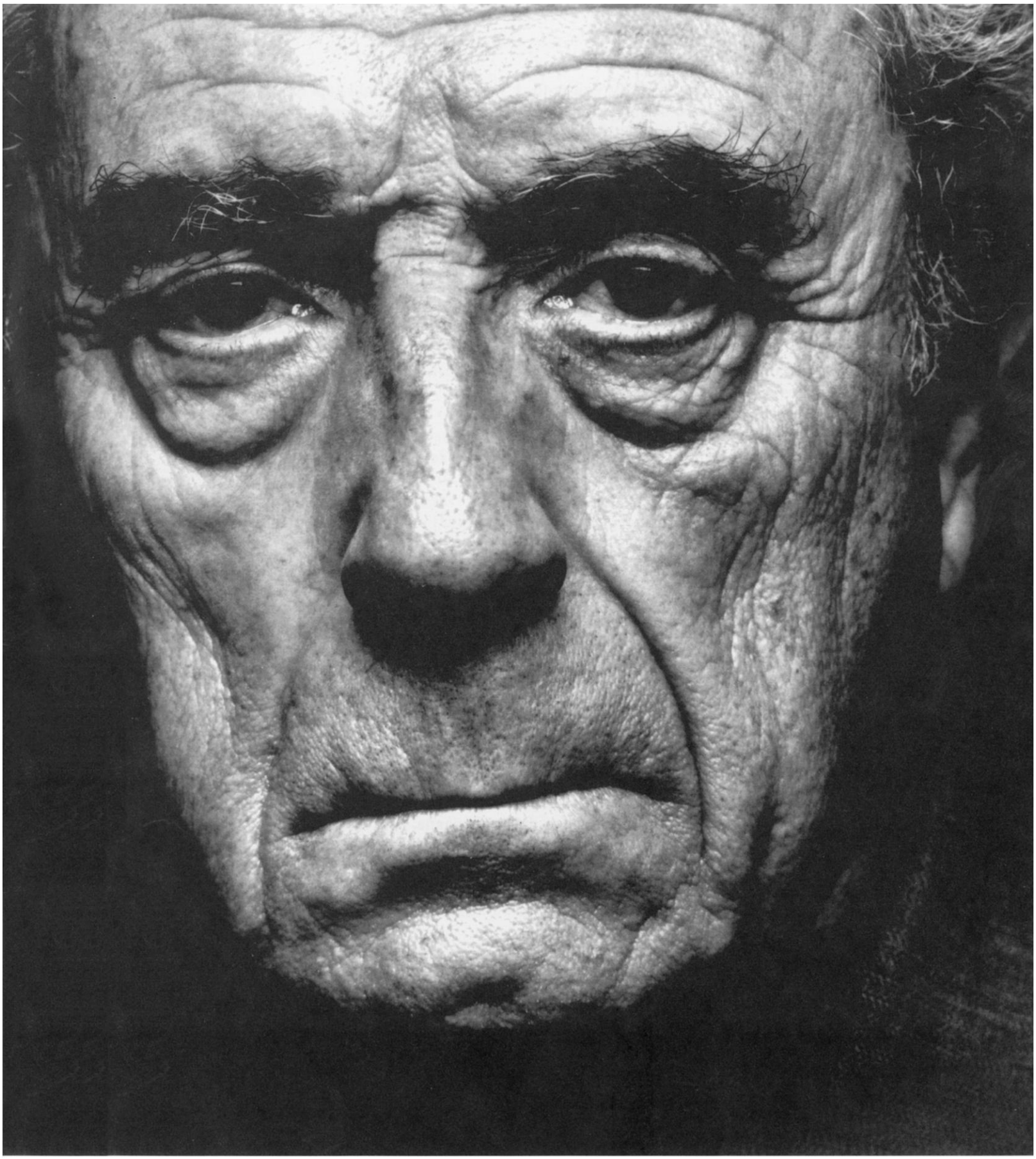
Of course. But I don't know how to sort these matters out either before or after the film is finished. For me a film is only a record of a period of my life. I find it terribly difficult to say whether I wanted to make this or that kind of film. I have never thought about the public. Only one person is the public. And it's me.

*Were you conscious in 1959, when you made* L'avventura, *that you were entering a radically different phase of your career?*

No. I have to tell you something. I never, never, never think of myself. Never. I'm a "man of action." I have to *do*. And every time I have tried to think about what I was doing it was so difficult that I decided not to do it any more.

*Does this most recent stage of your work concern general philosophical questions?*

Maybe. Because getting old, you try in a certain way to total things up—ideologically and morally and emotionally. But also because you read new and



Michelangelo Antonioni, 1995

Photo © Armin Linke

different things. You change the way you read. I started to read more books about science, for instance. I got very interested in astronomy and things like that, in the world, in the universe. As soon as you talk about the universe, everything is involved.

*Now your new film,* Identificazione di una donna . . .

This is the script [pats it on the table].

*Is the script more like the films of the early 60s, more like* L'eclisse *or* La notte, *than the later films?*

Yes, I think so.

*Set in Italy?*

In Italy, in Rome. But there is something new compared to those earlier movies. That is to say, the milieu—the way they live, these people—is more contemporary. There is a lot of vulgarity. The cars. The people, I mean everything. I am in very close contact with this town. The life of the people in Italy today is very vulgar.

*Am I right in detecting a dramatic change when you stopped collaborating with Suso Cecchi D'Amico and started working with Tonino Guerra?*

Yes.

*Pio Baldelli2 says that D'Amico's scripts were like high-class fumetti [comic strips] for ladies' magazines.*

The movies?

*Not the movies, but the scripts. I think Baldelli was making a distinction between the scripts and your resultant films. He felt that* Le amiche, *for instance, very much weakened Pavese, that D'Amico had sentimentalized it. How do you feel?*

I wouldn't say that D'Amico wrote the script. The script came out of a cooperation between me and two women: Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Alba De Cespedes. D'Amico is not a great writer, but she's a good writer. She knows the feminine mentality very well. But they hated each other, Suso and Alba, so they never talked together. I picked up some material from one and some more material from the other, and then I did the script. Maybe the script was not as good as it might have been. However, I believe that the substance of the film is dramatic enough. The emotional and existential crises of the characters are the same kinds of crises you find in my other films, though the material was structured in a different way.

*You're working with Tonino Guerra again on* Identificazione di una donna.

I had this idea for *Identificazione di una donna* many years ago, and I wrote some scenes, I made some notes, and I kept thinking of it all during those years. And suddenly, two summers ago, I was in Sardinia, and I wrote it. I wrote a hundred pages. Very quickly, in ten days. And then I gave the script to Gerard Brach, Polanski's scriptwriter. Brach is very intelligent and very able. But he did not write much original material; he only developed the hundred pages which I had written. And then, one night he left for Paris and I needed someone to discuss the scenario with, so I turned to Tonino. I work very well with Tonino. He and I wrote the final draft.

*The published English version of* L'avventura *shows that you cut out many things. To me its elliptical quality makes it one of the first great modernist films. Was your method to write the scenario and then to omit parts as you shot and edited the film?*

Yes.

*To let the audience fill in the gaps themselves?*

Yes. It's very instinctive for me, you know. Now I cut my movies by myself, and I like it very much. And it comes very naturally to me to cut something. My two best shots—nobody saw them because I cut them! One in *N.U.* [*Netezza urbana*—on garbage workers in Rome] and one in *Blow-Up.* Oh, it was so beautiful. Do you remember the tunnel under the Thames? There is an elevator. It was in the introduction to the movie.

*What's the shot?*

The protagonist was going toward the elevator, at the end of the tunnel. And he got into the elevator and went up. I moved the light: it was beautiful.

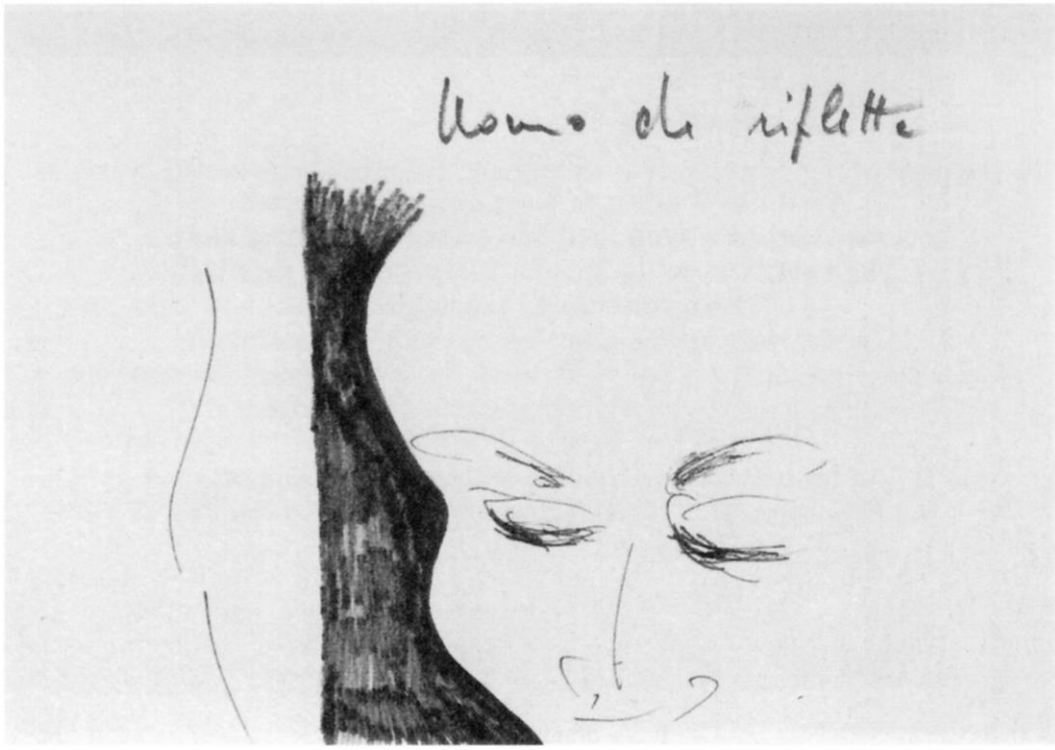
*And what about the shot deleted from* N.U.*?*

I was on top of Via Sistina, on top of Piazza Espagna, near the obelisk, at dawn. The streets were deserted, and if you look down you see Via Sistina, Piazza Barberini, Via Quatro Fontanne, the whole street—that day you had a gray sky—it was fantastic.

Le Amiche *was still in the narrow screen format, and when you moved to the wide screen—when you made* L'avventura*—it became possible to have several people in the frame without crowding, and to convey a new sense of design. Did you feel liberated by the wide screen?*

Well, I can't say, because, you know, I'm so tied to the reality. I'm like the other Michelangelo when they told him, "Listen, this is the Sistine Chapel; you have to paint it—this size, not larger or narrower." And the same is true of my screen: if it's wide, I have to imagine the composition, you know, according to the wide space; if it's small,

## Uomo di rifletta




A dead end street. Blackened brick houses.
A pair of shutters painted white. A street lamp.
A red shiny drainpipe.
A motorcycle covered with a tarpaulin because it is raining.
I'm curious to see who will come down this street which reminds me of
Charlie Chaplin.
The first passer-by will do.
I want someone English for this very English street.
I wait for three and a half hours.
Darkness is starting to cast its usual halo around the
street lamp as I leave without having seen a soul.
I believe that these little defeats, these empty
moments, these aborted observations, are fruitful all the same.
When we have put enough of them together, without knowing how or why,
a story comes out of them.
The story for "Il grido" came to me while I was looking at a wall.

to the small one. But I must say that I prefer the larger frame.

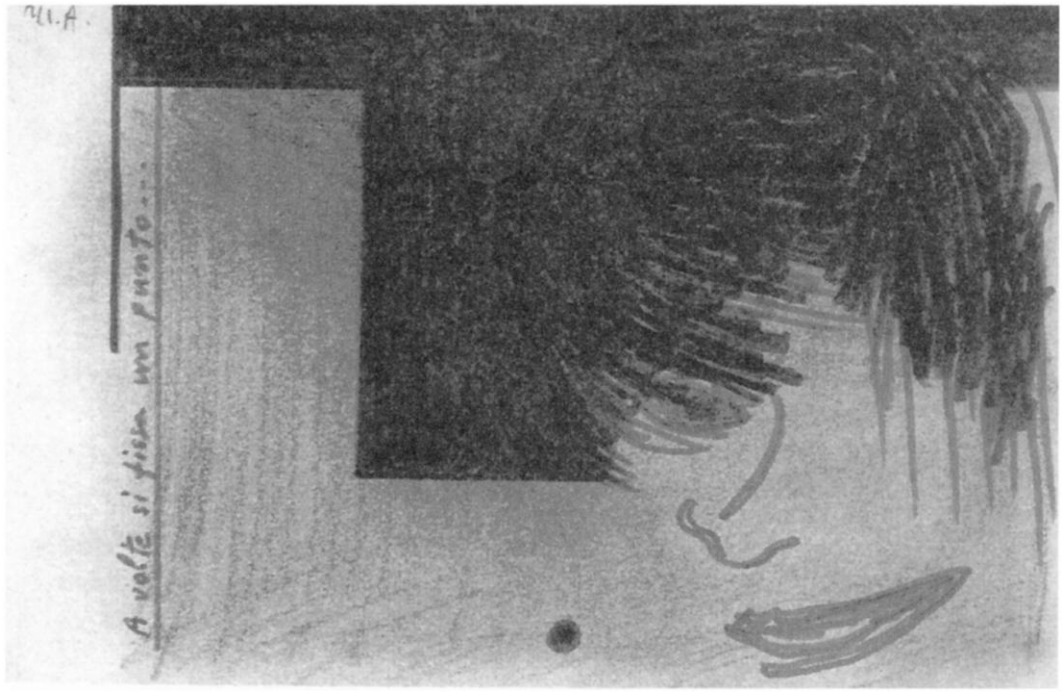
*How do you feel about [the made-for-TV]* Il mistero di Oberwald?

Well, you know, it's not one of my films. I just directed it. And I tried to do my best. It's a kind of melodrama, a very strong drama between a queen and an anarchist. It also contains some ideological reference to our contemporary scene in Italy: this anarchist could be compared to a terrorist, though the connection is rather slender. But I found it diverting to tell a kind of story which is so different from my own stories. I have never shot very dramatic scenes, but in this film I had to do so. That didn't frighten me because in this strong scene the emotions are very precise. They are not full of nuance or withheld; they are not ambiguous. It is much easier to shoot this kind of film.

*How did it come about?*

Well, Monica Vitti proposed that I shoot Cocteau's *La voix humaine,* but I didn't want to do it because it might seem like a kind of

**A volte si fissa un punto**




It is a dramatic moment,
but one character may not even be looking at the other.
He knows the face, knows exactly what the man is thinking and why.
He has to look the other way to understand,
into empty space.

confrontation: Rossellini had already shot a version with Anna Magnani. So we had Cocteau in hand and we selected *L'aigle à deux têtes [The Eagle with Two Heads].* Maybe it was a mistake: I don't know. But I thought it was easier to do.

*And then you could concentrate on the technical opportunities?*

Yes. It was interesting because of the possibility of writing the film while making it, while inventing it, more than we anticipated. When I am shooting a sequence, normally I try to find the solution, the technical solution, within the set itself. I make a travelling shot here, a close-up there, and so on. When you rehearse on TV you are in touch with the cameramen through a microphone, so you tell them, "Go from here to there," and you see the rehearsal on the monitor. And you find a lot of things in between these two points that you hadn't predicted.

*How about video color-mixing in* The Mystery of Oberwald*? Were you satisfied with your experience?*

Well, you know, the electronic field is something completely new and very exciting. Because you have everything in your hand: you can put in colors, you can make the image more completely abstract. The possibilities are infinite!

*I hear that you are planning to colorize* L'avventura.

As soon as I have time, I want to try. I mean, of course we have a lot of limits, but I think we can do it. You know why: because there is a picture in *Il mistero di Oberwald*, an old picture, you remember those old discolored photographs, about this big? Suddenly this figure becomes stronger, like a real person. And behind him there is some landscape, and the landscape becomes a little green, and this guy a little blue. So why don't we try to add color to a film? To transfer from film to tape, and then put in the colors, electronic colors.

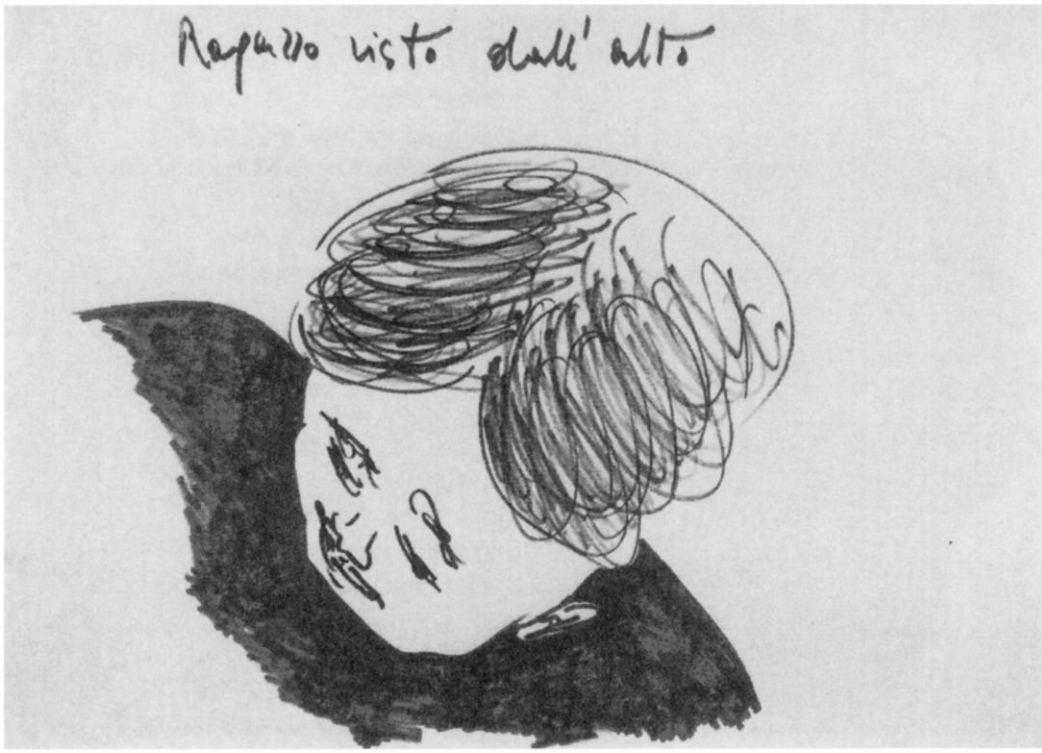
*For showing emotions?*

Well, to emphasize.

*You've always liked to play off narrative conventions, for instance, the* roman noir.

Yes, but in fact narrative conventions have given me a lot of trouble. Also cinematographic conventions. I always try to avoid them. However, it's not always possible, because you risk fail-

**Ragazzo visto dall'alto**




Rome sunk in garbage
heaps of multi coloured rubbish piled at street corners,
an orgy of abstractions, a visual assault never seen before.
In contrast to which stand the street sweepers,
gathered among the ruins of the Circus Maximus.
Two thousand men in blue overalls,
waiting in dumb silence for I know not what.
A story can even start like this:
by observing an atmosphere which will later become the background.
This is often a useful method in filmmaking,
it makes it easier to reach visual cohesion.

ing to communicate. Since the public is used to a certain kind of story, it's necessary to follow conventions a bit—but only a bit. One can't risk being incomprehensible.

*We talked about ellipsis—leaving things out. Now there are other possible developments in narrative, for instance, there is experimentation with point of view or stream of consciousness, interior monologue. You've never been interested in that?*

Yes, I thought of it—interior monologue. But I don't like it for film. I think it's very easy. Too easy. The challenge is to express the same things in a different way.

*By surface appearances?*

Yes.

*Eisenstein wanted to make* The American Tragedy *as an interior monologue film, and have the voice-over of the hero speak his thoughts, though his lips were closed. Would that have been too easy?*

It is too easy. Because as soon as you notice the technique, the film goes down a level, in my opinion.

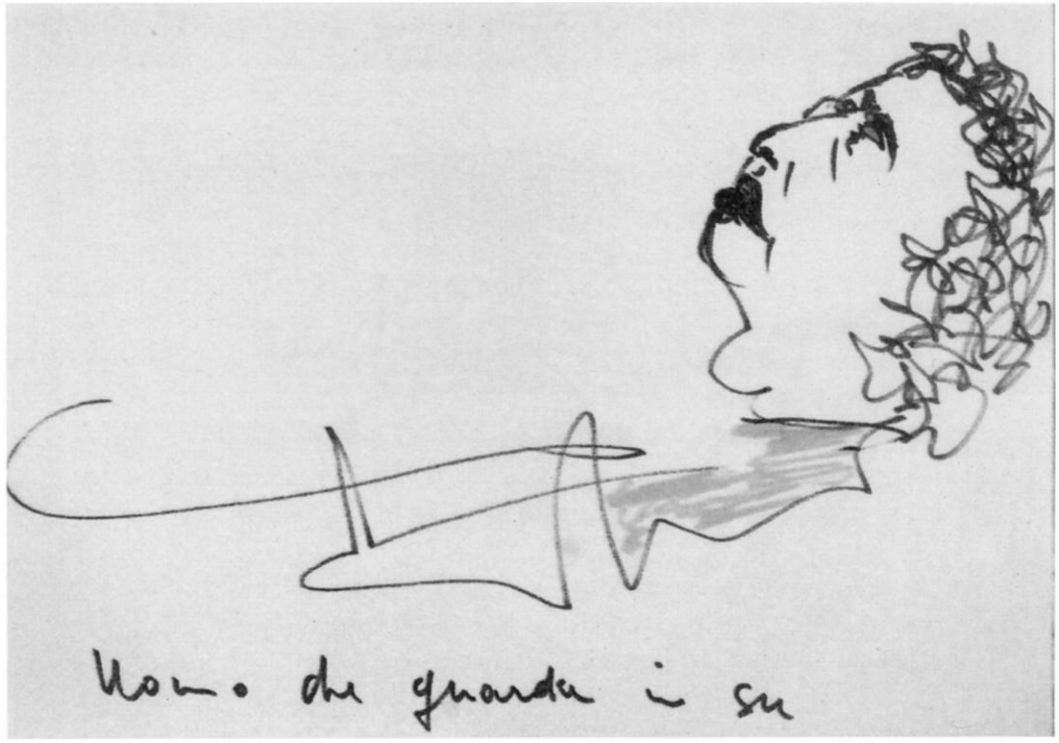
*Are there any other modern novelistic techniques that you would like to capture on film?*

No, because I never think of technique. I just choose the technique when I start to shoot, not before.

*The subject starts with the visual?*

Yes.

## Uomo che guarda in su




I find myself in a large crowded place,
it's as though the babble of voices I hear doesn't
come from the people there.
They walk and move about in dumb silence,
their voices belong to a different sound track.
Often not even connected to the scene.

*First you see something, then you make up a story in your head about what you see? Then you write it down. Then you go out and find a location?*

No. I have to see the location while I am writing, not after. I cannot describe a landscape without knowing it. Unless it is a house: a house is very easy to create in my imagination. But if I'm making something in the street, I have to know which street I am talking about. I want to see first, then I place the characters. Actually, the streets give me the idea for the scene.

*But when the original subject is expanded into a full film, then you have to find other locations to match that original one?*

No. If I select a location, I want to shoot in that one, not another one which matches that one. That is my way of being autobiographical.

*You would never write an autobiography?*

No, I don't think so. I could only tell something which happened at a given moment of my life. If I think, for instance, of *Cronaca di un amore* . . . You remember the movie is about money? And what I remember about myself is that I didn't have any money at that time. And that's very important, because I looked at that story from a certain angle.

*From the angle of Guido [the male protagonist]?*

No, it was from the angle of . . . I mean, I acted like I *had* money, because I wanted to have it. I never succeeded.

*I want to ask about the future. You mentioned wanting to do a science-fiction film, an animal film, and a film of violent action.*

Well, I just have some ideas. I cannot tell you about them. But I have different needs now. I'm fed up with psychology, with emotional analysis, psychological introspection. I'd like to try something else.

I next saw Antonioni in 1982 at a conference in his home town, Ferrara, in honor of his seventieth birthday: the conference papers were published as *Identificazione di un autore (Identification of an Auteur)* in 1985. Later that year, he kindly sent a print of *Identificazione di una donna,* and agreed to come to celebrate the publication of my book at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley. But sadly a debilitating stroke interfered.

For several years, Antonioni had tried to get funding for *La Ciurma (The Crew),* cowritten with Mark Peploe, the scenarist of *The Passenger.* The film was to have been about a mutiny at sea against a yacht owner trying to save everything on his ship in a terrific storm. Antonioni wrote that the crew's behavior "seems counter to good sense, but the sailors have their reasons." Violence in such circumstances is "logical . . . [because it] is the only contemporary way to live and survive." For the cast he wanted Matt Dillon, Kurt Russell, Giancarlo Giannini, and Gérard Dépardieu, and he had invited Martin Scorsese to be co-director. He also prepared a script, with Rudolph Wurlitzer, called *Due Telegrammi (Two Telegrams)* about a woman in an office in a skyscraper who receives a telegram from her husband asking for a divorce. The shock makes her dizzy. Observing a man framed in the window of an office in the skyscraper opposite, she sends him a telegram but instead of answering her, he tosses the telegram out of the window, and she watches it flutter slowly to the ground (the shot would surely have been endless).

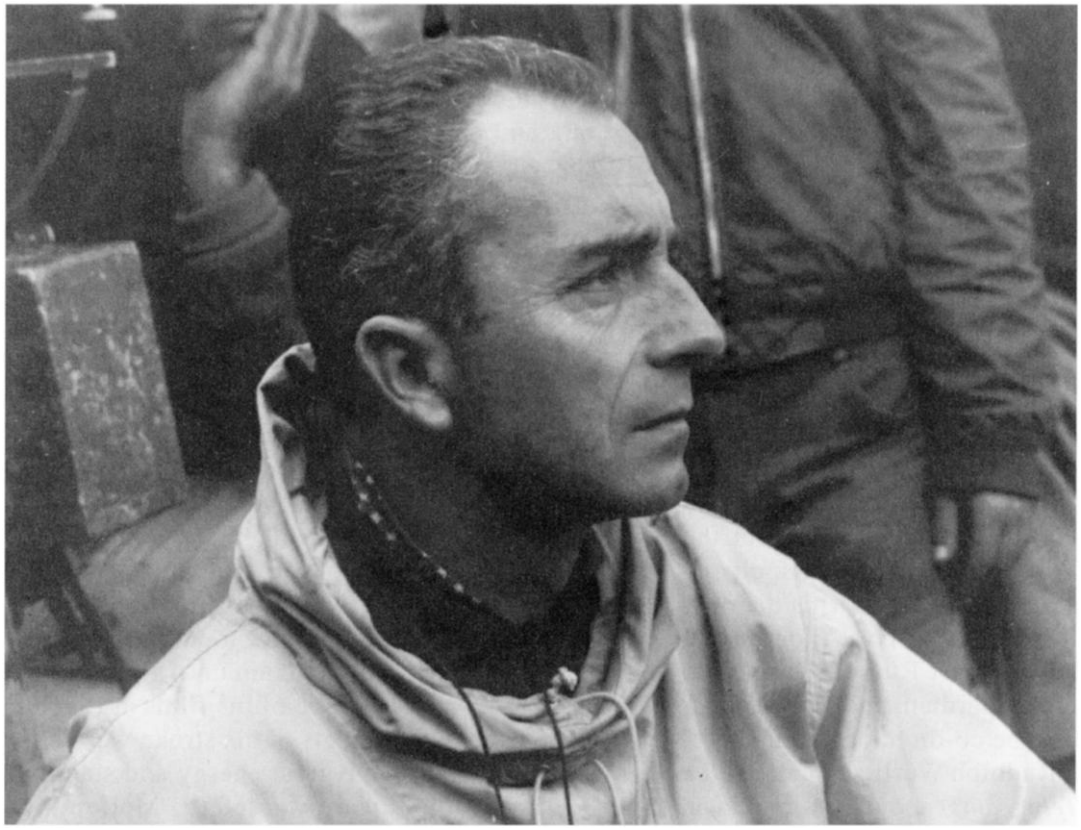
The only film that Antonioni was actually able to shoot in 1983 was the short *Ritorno a Lisca Bianca (Return to Lisca Bianca),* an amusing revisit to the bleak Aeolian island which was the setting for *L'avventura.* Reverberating voices on the soundtrack keep calling "Anna, Anna": she's still missing after all those years.

Antonioni doubtless felt so frustrated by his inability to turn his sketches and scenarios into films that he published them, first as pieces in the Italian newspaper *Il Corrière della sera,* and then as a book of short stories, called *Quel bowling sul Tevere* (translated by William Arrowsmith as *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber* [Oxford University Press, 1986]). During these years Antonioni continued painting, and his series of pictures called *Montagne Incantate (The Enchanted Mountains)* was exhibited at the Museo Correr in Venice as part of a Biennale, and again in 1993 at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara. (These and other works are now in the new Antonioni Museum in Ferrara.)

His devastating stroke in 1985 left him unable to talk and paralyzed on one side of his body. In 1986, he married his longtime companion and assistant, Enrica Fico (who played Nadia in *Identificazione di una donna*), and with her help slowly resumed his career. He and Enrica gathered footage shot in India in 1979 and assembled it into the short documentary *Kumbha mela* in 1989. It was shown at the Cannes Film Festival. For the World Cup Soccer matches in Italy in 1990, he contributed the short subject "Roma" to a compilation film on Italy called *12 autori 12 cittá (Twelve Auteurs Twelve Cities).* In 1992, he made several travelogue documentaries (with exquisite cinematography) about various places in Italy—Noto (the Sicilian city in which part of *L'avventura* is set), Mandorli, Vulcano, and Stromboli—and one about Carnevale.

I didn't see Antonioni again until 1992, on the occasion of a retrospective of his films at Lincoln Center. Though the effects of his stroke were visible, he seemed to have great energy and stamina. In 1995, Antonioni was awarded the Motion Picture Academy's Oscar for Lifetime Achievement; it was presented by Jack Nicholson in an event viewed by an enormous world television audience. His new film, *Al di là delle nuvole (Beyond the Clouds)* premiered at the American Film Institute. The film is in four parts, connected by the wanderings of a film director in search of subjects. (This wrap-around frame story was done by Wim Wenders.) Antonioni's four segments are set in Ferrara, Portofino, Paris, and Aix-en-Provence, and are based on some of the sketches in *Quel bowling sul Tevere.* The film has not been distributed in America, so it may be useful to describe it briefly.

The Ferrara episode, "Story of a Love Affair That Never Existed," concerns the inexplicable refusal of a young man (played by Kim Rossi Stuart) to make love to a beautiful woman (Ines Sastre) who has received him into her bed. The narrator of the published story explains: "Only a citizen of Ferrara can understand a relationship that lasted eleven years without ever existing." In the Portofino episode, "The Girl, the Crime," the director (John Malkovitch) meets a salesgirl (Sophie Marceau) in a seaside boutique who both sleeps with him and confesses that she killed her father, stabbing him twelve times. (Why twelve? "Twelve stabs were much more familiar, more domestic,



Michelangelo Antonioni on the set of *L'avventura*

than two or three," writes the narrator of the short story.) A gentler but no less enigmatic woman is the heroine of "This Body of Dirt" (Irène Jacob). Smiling, she allows a young man (Vincent Perez) to follow her to church in Aix; he falls asleep as she prays, then wakes and races back to her apartment. When he asks if he can see her again, she gracefully declines, explaining that she is entering a convent the next day. The Paris episode, "Don't Look For Me," is perhaps the most familiarly Antonionian: a sophisticated Parisienne (Fanny Ardant), sick of her husband's relationship with his mistress, moves out. She finds what seems to be an empty apartment to rent. But the owner of the apartment (Jean Reno)—who has himself just been left by his wife—returns before she unpacks. So the two "losers" join forces. The film is perhaps as close to comedy as Antonioni has ever come. He had originally intended to base this episode on *Two Telegrams,* but he was unable to get access to two adjacent skyscrapers as a set.

Antonioni's astonishing ability to direct *Beyond the Clouds* was the subject of Enrica Antonioni's fine hour-long documentary *Fare un film è per me vivere (Making Films Is My Life),* a title taken from Antonioni's article in the Italian film journal *Cinema Nuovo.* It is fascinating to watch him communicate with cast and crew by hand and facial gestures and an occasional grunt. Wim Wenders was at his side through much of the shooting, but by his own testimony did more learning than helping.

At last account, Antonioni had not given up on *Two Telegrams* and is hoping to start shooting soon. He is now 85.

■ Seymour Chatman is Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric and Film at the University of California at Berkeley and author of *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca, 1978), *Antonioni, or the Surface of the World* (California, 1985), and *Coming to Terms* (Ithaca, 1990).

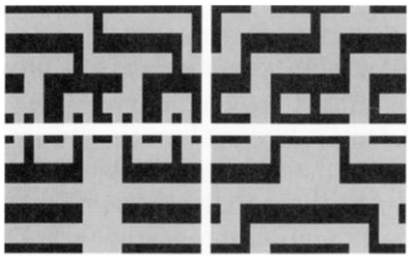
NOTES

Many thanks to Armin Linke, photographer, for his generous help, and to Michelangelo and Enrica Antonioni for graciously permitting the reproduction of Antonioni's drawings and text (published in *A volte si fissa un punto . . .* [Valverde, Catania: Girasole Editions, 1992]).

1. Gavriel Moses helped me polish the translations.
2. Pio Baldelli, *Cinema dell'ambiguità; Bergman e Antonioni,* second edition (Rome: 1971).

*Mark J. P. Wolf*

# Inventing Space



## Toward a Taxonomy of On- and Off-Screen Space in Video Games

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of commercial video games, which began with Nolan Bushnell's *Computer Space* arcade game in 1971. In the past quarter century, the video game market has boomed and has proven to be powerful competition for film and television; and as films like *Super Mario Bros.* (game, 1985; film, 1993), *Street Fighter* (game, 1987; film, 1994) and *Mortal Kombat* (game, 1992; film, 1995) have shown, a source of material as well. In the last ten years, home computers and CD-ROM drives have taken over a large sector of the gaming market, although game systems such as Super Nintendo, Virtual Boy, Atari Jaguar, Sega Genesis, and others continue on in the game-console tradition. Stand-alone arcade-style video games found in malls are also keeping pace, moving into ever more detailed three-dimensional environments, virtual reality, and simulator games.

Despite more than two decades of development, there is relatively little scholarly study of these games. As audiovisual entertainment whose content is largely representational, video games have a lot more in common with film and television than merely characters and plotlines. Video games compete for audiences at the very same sites as film and TV—most multiplex theaters have video games in the lobby, if not a separate room devoted to them, and home video game systems use the television set itself, trading game programs for broadcast ones. Even the video rental industry now rents games and game systems. Theoretically, many of the same issues are present in video games and film: spectator positioning and suture, point of view, sound and image relations, semiotics, and other theories dealing with images or representation. Indeed, video games are themselves becoming more like film and television, embedding video clips within the games, or like *Dragon's Lair* (1983), *Space Ace* (1983), *Dragon's Lair II* (1991), and *Mad Dog II: The Lost Gold* (1992), relying on video sequences almost entirely. Many games now use recorded sounds rather than just computer-generated ones, and visually they include opening scenes, closing scenes, and credits, attempting to create a more cinematic experience (*Mad Dog II: The Lost Gold* has over a dozen screens' worth of end credits!). As video game graphics increase in resolution and film and television move into the digital realm, the gap between them continues to close.

At present, film and television theory are best equipped for dealing with the medium of video games, which clearly overlaps them in places and extends many of their ideas, such as the active spectator, suture, first-person narrative, and spatial orientation. Video games are certainly deserving of their own branch of theory, and it will likely be one which is in close kinship to film and television theory. The study of the video game as a form of art and entertainment will undoubtedly bring to light certain unacknowledged assumptions in areas of theory including reception, spectatorship, and narrative structure, as well as the nature of the diegetic world and one's experience of it.

One of the many phenomena shared by film and video games, for example, is the use of on-screen and off-screen space in the creation of a diegetic world. Most games, like films, contain scenes or

locations inhabited by goal-oriented characters who are subject to certain "rules" of behavior. Whether characters are represented by high-resolution photographic images or a few colored squares, basic narrative roles and functions (protagonist, antagonist, obstacles, arena of conflict, etc.) are still present. The added elements of navigation and interaction, however, lend an importance to the diegetic space which is unlike that found in film or television.

As in film, the development of on-screen and off-screen space did not occur in a smooth, straightforward fashion; however, a history of video games and their development is beyond the scope of this essay. The 1970s alone saw the appearance of numerous arcade-style video games, as well as home video game systems produced by Magnavox, Fairchild, RCA, Coleco, Atari, and Mattel. Game cartridges were produced by these companies and others, including Imagic, Apollo, Activision, Sears Roebuck. Film and television industries were also interested; CBS Electronics and 20th Century Fox made their own game cartridges, and several dozen movies and television shows became game cartridges for the Atari 2600 system alone.[1] Since some of these games are somewhat obscure or nearly impossible to find today, I will mainly use well-known games for most of the examples, and will limit my recounting of the history to a few highlights, focusing mainly on the use of on-screen and off-screen space and its similarities and dissimilarities to their counterparts in cinematic space.

Just as cinematic off-screen space differed from theatrical off-*stage* space that preceded it (for example, characters could walk off-screen into the space behind the camera), the off-screen space of the video game differs from that of film. First, unlike film, off-screen space in a video game does not have a pro-filmic referent the way a filmed space often does. When a live action film camera is set up and pointed at something, there is always space outside the frame, off-screen, whether it is actively used or acknowledged by the film-maker or not. In a video game, not only the representation of space, but its very implication, depend on being programmed and actively created. Second, because the video game has no default structure for its off-screen space, that space can be shaped and structured in new ways that did not develop in film or television. And finally, the video game, as an interactive medium, often gives the player some control over the point of view, allowing one to choose which spaces appear on-screen or off. Rather than wait for the film camera to show it, off-screen space can often be investigated and explored, and in some cases like *Adventure* (1978), *Doom* (1993), *Dark Forces* (1994), *Descent* (1995), *Stonekeep* (1995), or other maze-like games, it can constitute a large part of game play itself.

The design of the spaces depicted in video games can be attributed to both technical limitations and aesthetic influences. As video game technology developed, factors like hardware, software, processing speed, and memory limited what was technically and graphically possible; breakthroughs like the invention of the microprocessor in 1971 and development of the inexpensive AY 3-8500 chip in 1975 made smaller and faster games possible, as well as the entire home video game system industry. Graphically, technological improvements have helped games evolve from the simple blocky graphics of *Pong* (1972) and the Atari 2600 to the high-resolution, shaded, photorealistic images in CD-ROM games like *Myst* (1993), or games like *Doom* featuring detailed three-dimensional graphics that can change in perspective during real-time interaction.

Technical limitations, however, are not the only factors. The video game had a wide range of aesthetic influences; for example, commercially, it followed precedents set by pinball and other arcade games, and its cabinet and controls were designed accordingly. Graphically, it was limited by what computer graphics could reproduce; vectors (lines) and raster graphics (pixels). In the areas of representational characters, narratives, and spaces, there were the enormous precedents set by film and television imagery. It is perhaps due to the desire to measure up to the standards of visual realism set by film and television that the video game evolved as it has; today there are far fewer of the abstract game designs that were once so common in the days of *Qix* (1981) and *Tempest* (1980). Likewise, as computer technology allows faster and more affordable rendering and three-dimensional graphic environments, the structuring of off-screen space within video games increasingly follows the examples set by film, which paved the way and set precedents regarding the representation of complex, connected spaces onscreen. Today, the navigation of on-screen space has become more important than ever with the expansion of the World Wide Web, and nascent virtual reality spaces which are gradually finding their way to the Internet as well. Video

game worlds, then, can be seen as a kind of proto-cyberspace. En route to this present state, video games have explored a wide range of spatial geometries, and a number of different ways in which terms like "on-screen" and "off-screen" can function.

## Spatial Structures in Video Games

While there are a large range of spatial structures or "spaces" possible in video games, these can be broken down into more elementary structures, some of which have similar counterparts in film. All of these spaces have appeared in video games individually, and different combinations of them occur together in a variety of games. Each has found its niche, as some kinds of games are more appropriate in one type of space than another, or because some require less computing power than others. These types of spaces apply not only to arcade and home video games, but computer games and hand-held games as well, and some of these will be included as examples. They are presented here in order of increasing visual and conceptual complexity, each requiring varying amounts of concentration from the player. Unlike the film viewer who is led (visually) through the film's diegetic world by the film's characters, the video game player has a stake in the navigation of space, as knowledge of the video game's space is often crucial to a good performance.

### 1. No visual space; all text-based

A genre of home computer games, known collectively as "interactive fiction," includes *Planetfall* (1983), *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1984), and some of the earlier games in the *Zork* series. These games are completely text-based; the scenery, other characters, and the player's surroundings are presented as verbal descriptions delivered as text on-screen, and the player's replies and requests are typed commands, such as "north" or "open door." In this sense, there is no on-screen space to speak of; everything has to be imagined, based on the descriptions. One could argue that *everything* takes place off-screen, as on a radio program; or, if the concept of on-screen space is needed for the concept of off-screen space to make sense, one could argue that neither is present at all. Or, in still another sense, one could consider "on-screen" to mean "that which is currently being described by the text on-screen"; the use of descriptive text, then, raises the question of what it means to be "on-screen."

Part of the reason for the use of all text, at least initially, was the difficulty of doing graphics. Nor did the computer keyboard have a control like a joystick (although many games now use arrow keys or some other configuration of keys to indicate directions of movement). However, instead of seeing this as a liability, these games took advantage of the lack of graphics to leave the images to the player's imagination, much as a novel or as TSR's table-top game *Dungeons & Dragons* did (*D&D* used graph paper, dice rolls, and verbal description to build fantasy worlds). Although early computer graphics would have been fairly limited in what they could depict, any amount of subtle detail could be verbally described; the player could even be told what he or she was feeling in certain situations, if needed.

Today, text continues to be used in some of the MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) or MOOs (MUD, Object-Oriented) on the Internet, the gaming "rooms" visited by multiple players simultaneously, where all description, interaction, and dialogue are composed of text. When a player is inside a "room," he or she can hear all the dialogue occurring in that room, as well as descriptions of actions done by the occupants. After leaving the "room," the player will no longer know what is going on "inside" it; instead, there will be descriptions of the current "location" being visited. In this way, notions of "on-screen" and "off-screen" can reappear, even in a text-based environment.

The text-based environment differs from that of a book in that it can be time-based, especially when there are multiple players. Even though the descriptions may provide more detail than low-resolution graphics would, players must imagine the spaces based on descriptions, and react verbally as well; to some degree, both brain hemispheres are required to match up verbal and spatial processing, if the scenes described are to be visualized and connected. Because the action taking place is indirect, the pace of these games is slower, and reaction time much less of a factor, making these games something of an exception—and today a rarity—in the world of video games. Although some games may incorporate text-based informational screens (as in

*Stellar Track* [1981]), only a few games, like *Myst* (1993), come close to being a graphic equivalent of these kinds of games; *Myst*, in fact, makes frequent use of on-screen text, in a series of books and letters the player reads on-screen.

## 2. One screen, contained

Text-based games are only a tiny minority in the video game world compared to graphic-based video games, in which space is graphically depicted instead of just verbally described. Computer games first appeared on mainframe computers, and one of the earliest ones to contain on-screen graphics was a game called *Spacewar*, developed in 1961 by Steve Russell and J. M. Graetz at MIT. This was the game that inspired Nolan Bushnell, who adapted it in 1971 into the first coin-operated stand-alone arcade video game, *Computer Space*. From the $500 he made in profits, he was able to incorporate his company, Atari, the following year, and produce his second arcade game, *Pong* (1972). After its success in game rooms, *Pong* was developed into a home video game system in 1975. Following this, in 1977, was the release of the Atari 2600 Video Computer System, which soon came to dominate the market. The Atari 2600 was, however, by no means the first home video game system; Magnavox's Odyssey 100 system had appeared in 1972 and its Odyssey 200 system in 1975, and Coleco's Telstar and the Fairchild/Zircon Channel F had appeared in 1976. Atari, however, was able to license the game that was one of the huge, international, early successes in the video game world: Taito's *Space Invaders*, brought to the U. S. by Midway in 1978. Atari's own *Asteroids* in 1979 further contributed to the company's success, as did its licensing of *Pac-man* (1980) for its home system in 1981. Since its beginning, then, the video game has been primarily graphics-oriented.[2]

Many early video games were designed so that the entire game was contained on a single screen of graphics; the player did not leave the screen, nor did the screen scroll to reveal off-screen space. *Space Invaders*, *Pong*, *Breakout* (1976), and other games had all their action contained on one screen and there were no other levels; the destroyed characters or objects simply were replaced and the action was faster. Cinematically, these games resembled the early films of Lumière and Méliès, in which the camera was pointed at the action and remained static for the duration of the action, without any editing to link it to other locations. Even the instantaneous disappearance of game objects (like the destroyed space invaders) is similar to Méliès' stop-action effects in films like *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *The Black Imp* (1907), in which objects or people suddenly vanish.

Both the early films and the early games also acknowledged that there was a space outside the frame, even if it was never shown; for example, in *Pong*, missed balls fly off-screen, scoring a point, and in *Space Invaders*, bullets missing the invaders fly up and off-screen. Likewise, Lumière's *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895) showed people moving through the frame who disappeared off the edge of the screen in a manner similar to the bullets and balls. Although this off-screen space was not actively used (objects leaving the screen were not seen again), its presence was implied in either case.

## 3. One screen, contained, with wraparound

A variation on the single-screen video game is one in which space is finite but unbounded; objects leaving the top of the screen immediately reappear on the bottom, maintaining their same speed and trajectory. The top and bottom of the screen "wrap around" to meet, as do the left and right sides of the screen. *Asteroids* was among the first games to use this kind of space, as well as certain games in *Combat* (1977), the cartridge shipped along with all Atari 2600 systems. The asteroids (or fighter planes in *Combat*) move in straight lines, exiting the frame and reentering on the other side until destroyed by the player. In this sense, there is really no off-screen space to speak of; everything in each of these tiny universes is represented on-screen, a structuring of space that had never arisen anywhere in film (although it could have, in animation).

A slight variation on this ordering of space occurs in *Pac-man*; the game has a space similar to that of type 2, except for a tunnel allowing Pac-man to exit the screen on the right or left side of the frame and reappear on the opposite side. When passing through the tunnel, though, Pac-man does not immediately appear on the other side; there is a slight pause between the moment he leaves the screen and the moment he reemerges. This implies that the tunnel is slightly longer than what is shown on-screen, and suggests a tiny bit of off-screen space that is never seen, which the character can

pass through. For the most part, though, games using wraparound depict a self-enclosed space, finite but unbounded, in which all the game's action occurs.

In both type 2 and type 3, the player can see everything there is to see on-screen, and will probably concentrate most on the character represented there which he or she is controlling. However, the reactions to the two spaces differ somewhat: in type 2, the edges of the screen are walls, and thus one can safely turn one's back on them; the focus then becomes mainly the center of the screen, where threats are more likely to come from. In type 3, targets or attackers can "wrap around," disappearing off one side of the screen and reappearing on the far side, and so edges must be paid more attention, since it is often harder to keep track of these off-and-on movements. Although in both cases the action is wholly contained on-screen, different parts of the screen become important and require attention depending on how the space is configured.

## 4. Scrolling on one axis

Certain genres of video games require more than a single screen's worth of graphics for their action; racing games, like Atari's *Street Racer* (1978) and Activision's *Skiing* (1980), need a long strip of space for players to travel through. Other games involving the shooting or catching of moving objects while moving through a space, like *Defender* (Atari 2600 version, 1982) or Activision's *Stampede* (1981), also use a long, track-like space. By moving the game's "set pieces" across the screen, often synchronized with the player's movements, a "scrolling" space is made, in which objects come on and off the screen. In some games, these configurations of objects are always the same, allowing a player to anticipate what lies ahead in the game, off-screen but approaching. These games make active use of off-screen space, using it to build a player's anticipation, and sometimes creating the illusion of an endless track of space which players could continue moving through, provided they were good enough at the game to keep going. Seeing more and more of this "track" can itself be a kind of reward, just as moving to higher levels is in other games.

Spatial scrolling can occur horizontally, as it does in most games like *Defender*, *Stampede*, *Space Jockey* (1982), and others, or vertically as in *Skiing* and *Street Racer*. It can also be used to reveal spaces which the player has to return to later, as in Activision's *Keystone Kapers* (1983) which depicts three levels of a department store; the screen scrolls horizontally, and the upper levels of the store can only be reached by elevators or escalators at the far right and left ends of the scrolling space. Cinematically, the revealing of off-screen space by scrolling or reframing the image is accomplished by tracking shots and crane shots (or by panning and tilting, if one ignores the changes in perspective in each). This movement can be traced back to panning used in early films like Porter's *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903), the tracking shots used in Queribet and Hepworth's *A Day with the Gypsies* (1906), or even farther back to the scrolling images of the dioramas of the late 1800s. In both the games and often in film, space scrolls through the frame in order to keep the moving character visible on-screen, to follow the action, and to build anticipation in the viewer. In the video game, however, it is the space which is being moved instead of the camera/viewer.

Whether or not a player must be able to recall the spaces passing on and off screen depends on the game. Some, like *Stampede* and *Street Racer*, do not allow the player to stop or change direction, nor is the space passed through ever returned to (except in repeated playings, where a player may be able to anticipate what is coming). Other games, like *Keystone Kapers* and *Defender*, allow a player to navigate and revisit spaces, putting more emphasis on spatial orientation and navigation, and making the experience more interactive as well.

## 5. Scrolling on two axes

Some games, like the computer game *Sid Meier's Civilization* (1993) or *SimCity* (1989), have screens that can scroll either side-to-side or up-and-down. This results in more than just a combination of the two types of scrolling, because it implies a large plane of space, of which only a small rectangle is seen at any given time. Most of these games involve a bird's-eye view of some terrain, although the objects within that terrain are typically shown in side view (resulting in scenes with perspectives similar to those found in medieval paintings before the Renaissance). Cinematically, this kind of sideways tracking movement is found mainly in cel animation, and occasionally in live action, such as the cut-away office set of Godard and Gorin's *Tout va bien* (1972), which the camera tracks side-to-side

and up-and-down.[3] The amount of scrolling possible can vary from one axis to the other (up and down movement may be limited to only certain spaces), as will the importance placed on spatial navigation. Like the wraparound screen, players often must monitor the edges of the screen for incoming characters, but unlike wraparound, there is more uncertainy as to when and where these characters will appear. Just as few films are long, unbroken tracking shots, most games do not use two-axes scrolling for displaying all of their spaces; instead, both media usually employ "cuts" between adjacent spaces.

## 6. Adjacent spaces displayed one at a time

The joining of contiguous spaces through cutting signaled the arrival of editing in the cinema. Likewise in video games like *Adventure* (1978) or *Superman* (1979), both for the Atari 2600, adjacent spaces or rooms are displayed as a series of nonoverlapping static screens which cut directly one to the next without scrolling, not only following the precedent set by film but relying on it to allow the player to make sense of the geography of the game. As the player's on-screen character moves off-screen in one direction, the screen changes instantly and the character reenters on the opposite side of the screen; the direction of screen movement is conserved, and the screens are seen as being immediately adjacent to one another, an assumption that relies on one's knowledge of continuity editing in film.[4] In both *Adventure* and *Superman*, the games' spaces can be mapped out as a series of screens joined side by side (although the *Superman* screens join together in a wraparound pattern; in some places, if you fly in one direction long enough, you will eventually return to the same screen).

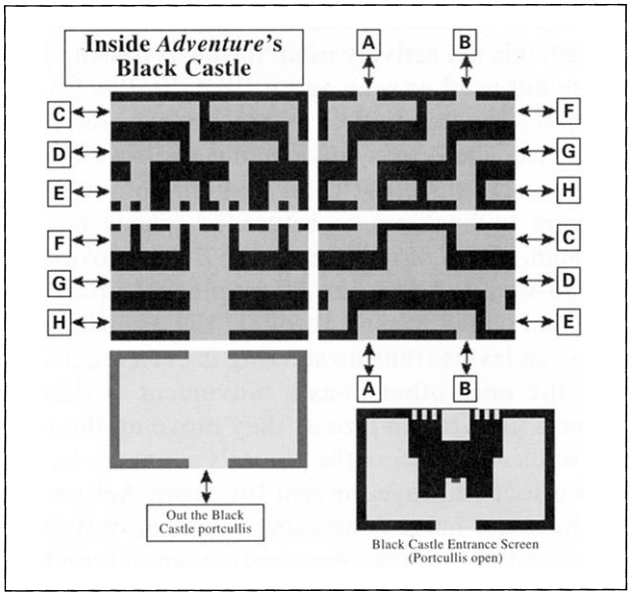
As film editing developed, some films were structured into a similar pattern of nonoverlapping adjacent spaces. For example, in both *The Lonely Villa* (1909) and *A Corner in Wheat* (1909), D. W. Griffith divides certain spaces into a series of static camera set-ups. The spatial representation of the villa in *The Lonely Villa* is remarkably like that of a video game, in both editing and graphics. As Rick Altman describes it:

> The film's space is divided up into a dozen mutually exclusive shots; that is, there is no overlapping between the fields of one shot and another. This method produces a fragmented view of space in which we never see an object or stationary character from more than one point of view. This fragmentation is compounded by the fact that the camera always remains immobile and level (except for a single low-angle shot of the burglar who climbs a pole to cut the wires).[5]

The movement of characters within the film is also graphically similar to the video game: "Each edge of the frame represents an entrance or exit; the dominant motion is thus across the frame, either horizontally or diagonally."[6] Robert Adams describes Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat* as having a similar set-up of adjacent nonoverlapping spaces, and this time including vertical spaces as well; for example, when the Wheat King falls through a trap door into a grain bin, the two spaces are shown separately.[7] As Altman points out, these films also use static camera set-ups, at right angles to the scenes, depicting them from a single point of view; a visual style similar to that found in many video games, visually simplifying the diegetic world and the action taking place there.

Adjacent spaces displayed using "cuts" between them can in some ways provide more suspense than a scrolling space, since the player does not see the space until it is entered. In *Adventure*, for example, a dragon would occasionally be hovering near the edge of the screen, and an unsuspecting player could be attacked immediately upon entering the screen. While similar "shock" cuts can be used in the cinema, in video games it is the player who decides when to cut to the next scene, and so there is an element of responsibility, control, and decision-making that one does not find in the cinema, which is often used to add an element of suspense into the design of a game.

*Adventure* for the Atari 2600 is one of the earliest games to make use of multiple connecting screens, and also nonplayer characters (three dragons and a bat) who can come on-screen and off-screen, or even be followed from one screen to another. The game contains more than two dozen interconnected screens, most of them spatially adjacent to one another. The way in which these spaces connect, however, need not be limited to those which can be mapped out on a flat surface (see illustration, "Inside *Adventure*'s Black Castle"). The interiors of the castles, which are entered through the on-screen castle gates rather than sides




*Adventure* for the Atari 2600 displays adjacent spaces one at a time, cutting between screens as characters leave or enter the frame. The player enters the Black Castle through the gate in the middle of the screen, and reappears in an empty room, which leads into the rest of the castle. The screens containing the maze in the Black Castle connect in wraparound fashion, top to bottom and side to side as shown above. Notice how the paths connect on the sides of the screens, resulting in a space which loops around itself and contains connections that cannot be mapped onto a flat surface.

of the screen, are an exception. The interiors of the castles in *Adventure* were among the early instances of off-screen space occurring *behind* or *inside* an object pictured on-screen, a space like that used for interiors in film.

In *Theory of Film Practice*, Noël Burch divides off-screen space into six "segments," and describes the first four of these as the areas beyond the four borders of the frame. He then adds:

> A fifth segment cannot be defined with the same seeming geometric precision, yet no one will deny that there is an off-screen space "behind the camera" that is quite distinct from the four segments of space bordering the frame lines, although the characters in the film generally reach this space by passing just to the right or left of the camera. There is a sixth segment, finally, encompassing the space existing behind the set or some object in it: A character reaches it by going out a door, going around a street corner, disappearing behind a pillar or behind another person, or performing some similar act.[8]

The castle interiors are clearly an example of Burch's sixth "segment" of space; entering the castle gate (located in the middle of the screen) immediately takes the player to a screen depicting the castle interior.

Besides the player's character, *Adventure* also features three dragons and a bat that can freely pass over the terrain and the objects on-screen; thus Burch's sixth type is also evoked as these characters pass in front of scenery. Although this was a step towards the idea of Z-axis depth on-screen (depth toward and away from the viewer), it was only indicated by momentarily replacing the pixels of the background with those of the character as it passed over (a concept in computer graphics known as "priority"). In *Adventure*, then, the idea of overlapping planes is indirectly suggested, but not graphically depicted with the illusion of depth.[9]

## 7. Layers of independently moving planes

A number of games, such as *Zaxxon* (1982) and *Super Mario Bros.*, depict a space made up of layers of overlapping and independently moving planes of graphics; the front layer contains the player-character (and often the scenery the character stands on), while the back layer contains background graphics and scrolls at a slower rate than the foreground, creating an illusion of depth. In some games, like *Warioland* (1995) for the Nintendo Virtual Boy system, the player-character can even jump from one plane to the other, at places indicated in the game. In these games, figure-ground relationships can become more complex, as graphic planes can function as either, depending on what is "behind" or "in front of" them, requiring more sophisticated degree of spatial orientation than was needed for the flat, single-plane

scenes of earlier games (the Virtual Boy system uses stereo three-dimensional graphics to help separate out its planes of action, though most games are wholly dependent on other depth cues).

The use of layers of planes creates a three-dimensional effect, without being truly three-dimensional; each layer is still a flat two-dimensional plane. The effect is similar to that created by the theatrical flats used on-stage as scenery, several layers of them providing depth, as well as places for actors to enter and exit. In video games, characters are present within these layers (as opposed to between them) along with the scenery, although the layers themselves pass in front of other layers. This is similar to compositing in film and video; for example, a television weatherman placed over a weather map, combining two layers of imagery. Thus, in these games, Burch's sixth segment of off-screen space came into maturity, bringing the graphical depiction of Z-axis depth to the games, even if it was in a somewhat limited fashion, as a series of two-dimensional overlapping and independently moving planes.

## 8. Spaces allowing Z-axis movement out of frame

Burch's fifth segment of space, extending behind the camera (or the viewer's point of view), was the slowest to emerge in video games, due to the difficulty of depicting the dimensional movement it required (objects growing larger until they move out of frame). Early appearances of objects moving toward the viewer and out of the frame can be found in the arcade game *Tempest* (1980), *Star Ship* (Atari 2600, 1977), and in *Night Driver* (arcade game, 1976; Atari 2600 version, 1980). *Tempest*, a vector game, depicts objects coming up the inside surfaces of a tunnel, growing larger until they reach full size at the edges of it. In a sequence at the end of each level, the tunnel grows in size, and the viewer's point of view is made to appear to be flying down through it to the next level; the tunnel, then, is passing into the space located behind the camera/viewer.

In *Night Driver* the screen is black, and contains two series of white rectangles, or posts, which come down the screen, growing in size (and moving sideways, as one "steers") to produce the illusion of driving on a road. A house, tree, and oncoming car that grow in size as they move down the screen provide additional depth cues. Although the space behind the camera/viewer is acknowledged, it is not actively used; the posts passing into it are not used or seen again (like the *Pong* balls or *Space Invader* bullets that leave the screen); in this sense, the Z-axis movement is one-way, as it is in the early scrolling games which do not allow players to back up or return to spaces passed through. Likewise in *Tempest*, the Z-axis movement is one-way and does not affect play; the player's point-of-view moves through the tunnel only between levels (thus no steering is even required), and the only other Z-axis movement is that of objects growing in size as they move up the tunnel to its edge, where the player's character is; the 3-D effect employed is just for show. Active use of the space behind the camera/viewer only later appeared in games representing an interactive three-dimensional environment.

## 9. Multiple, nonadjacent spaces displayed on-screen simultaneously

One of the more rare types of spatial structures found in video games involves two different points of view—each belonging to one of the players—displayed on-screen at once. While each of the viewpoints can contain any of the types spaces mentioned here, the combination of multiple viewpoints can make for a very different game, since attention can be split between two points of view. One such game is *High Velocity* (1995), a racing game for the Sega Saturn. Players can see both their own and their opponent's point of view on-screen, and can use this information to monitor each other's progress, and in some cases even slow each other down. One of the more interesting uses of this type of space, and one of the earliest examples of it, appears in *Spy vs Spy*, a game released by First Star Software in 1984 for the Commodore 64, Apple II, and Atari home computers. In the game, two players (the White Spy and the Black Spy) travel through rooms looking for certain objects (passport, money, key, and secret plans) that a player must get in order to win. While doing so, each player can set traps for the other player, or get caught in the other player's traps. The screen is divided into two smaller screens, each representing the room a player's Spy is in, and both players play simultaneously and can see what the other player is doing at all times, even if they are in different rooms (see figures 1 through 4).[10] In order to play the game well, a play-

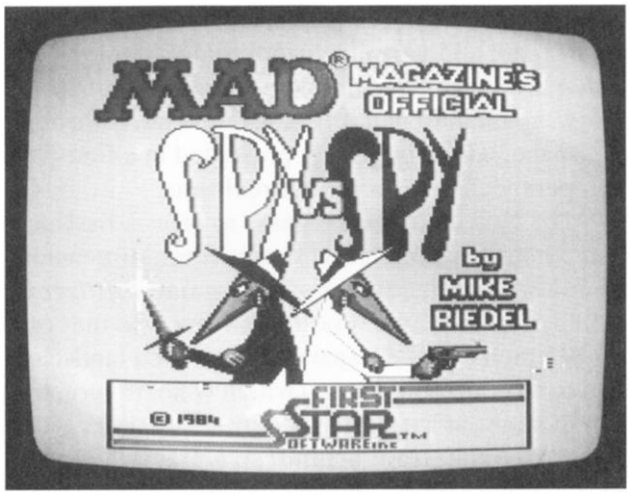



**Figure 1** The title screen of First Star Software's *Spy vs Spy* game for the Commodore 64 computer.

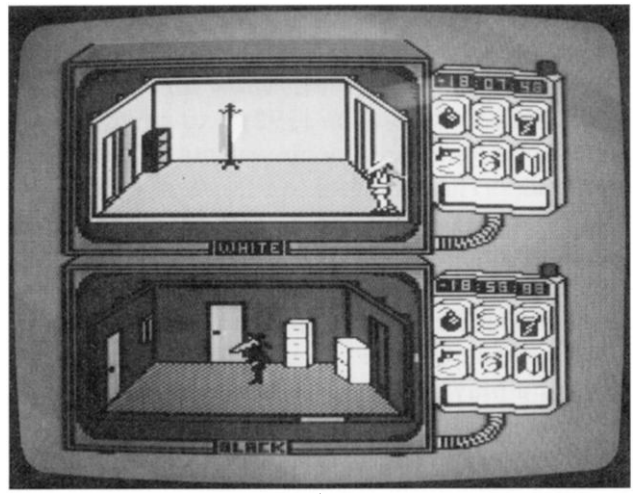



**Figure 2** A typical game screen from *Spy vs Spy*. Each Spy has his own window, trapulator (the menu board on the right side), and timer. Play is simultaneous, and both arenas of action must be watched in order to avoid traps.

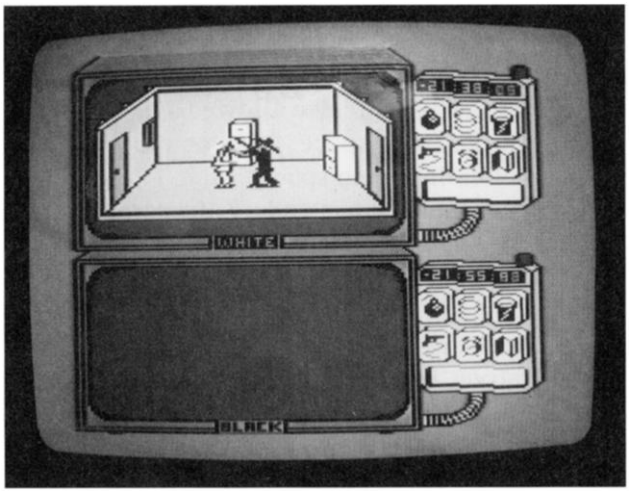



**Figure 3** The Black Spy has entered the room where the White Spy already is, so his screen goes blank and he appears on the White Spy's screen above.

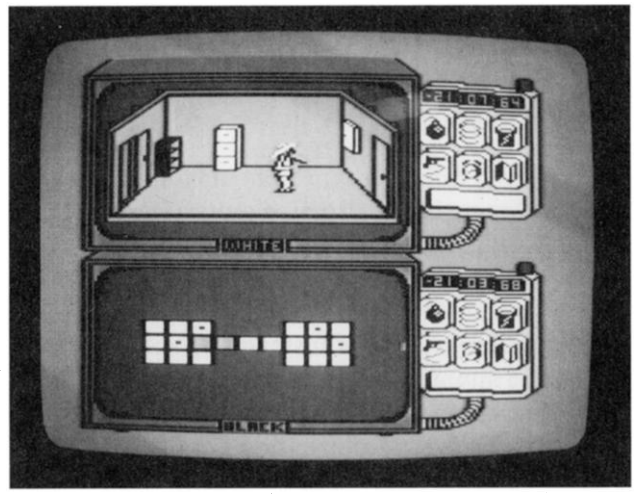



**Figure 4** The player controlling the Black Spy checks the Help Map, and the room screen is replaced by the map, which represents rooms by adjacent rectangles. A blinking rectangle indicates the room the player's Spy is currently in. Rooms containing dots indicate the locations of important items the Spies need to win.

er must find the required objects as well as watch what the other Spy is doing elsewhere. Since multiple, nonadjacent spaces are depicted on-screen simultaneously, each Spy is in his own space and screen; "off-screen" could then apply to the rest of the rooms of the maze not on-screen, or, if we take "off-screen" to mean the *player's screen* within the game, we could say that the opposing Spy's off-screen actions are depicted on the other player's screen. The meaning of "off-screen" varies, then, depending on the screen to which we are referring.

Although not very common in video games (some multiple-player arcade games, such as *Dactyl Nightmare* [1992], use two screens instead of a split screen), the representation of multiple

nonadjacent spaces on-screen is more common in film. Split screens have been used in a wide variety of films (*Carrie* [1976], *Pillow Talk* [1959], and Abel Gance's *Napoleon* [1927], to name a few), often to show simultaneous events or actions of characters. The use of the split screen in the video game, then, serves a similar purpose (the depiction of simultaneous actions) but differs from the film because of the interaction possible in the video game, and the control the players have over which spaces are depicted or remain off-screen. In video games, a player also has more reason to identify with one screen (with the player-character), giving it the majority of his or her attention, rather than divide it equally among the images in a split-screen sequence of a film. Games like *Spy vs Spy*, in which watching the other player's actions is an important part of the strategy, do create an interesting tension between passive watching and active playing, and between thought and action, that can make the player much more aware of the difference between the two modes of activity.

## 10. Interactive three-dimensional environment

While *Spy vs Spy* does represent movement through a three-dimension interactive environment, it still depicts each of its spaces—the rooms—from a single point of view, much like a Griffith film of the action would (although Griffith, of course, would have used cross-cutting instead of a split screen to depict the simultaneous actions). Most games representing their diegetic space as an interactive three-dimensional environment follow, to some degree, the precedent set by the space represented in the classical Hollywood film.[11] Spaces and the objects in them can be viewed from multiple angles and viewpoints, which are all linked together in such a way as to make the diegetic world appear to have at least enough spatial consistency so as to be navigable by the player. The way the player is allowed to freely navigate the space varies widely. A few games—like *Dragon's Lair* or *Space Ace*, which use film clips stored on a laserdisc—give the player some control over a character's actions, but spatially they are not much more navigable than a film, which gives the viewer no control over which spaces are seen when. Others, like *Myst*, allow for more navigation of space, but limit the player to selection of rendered views of the space, limiting the viewing angles and standpoints available. Still other games, like *Doom*, *Dark Forces*, *Descent*, and *Stonekeep*, and various virtual reality games, provide players with an unbroken exploration of space, allowing them to pan, tilt, track, and dolly through the space, which is usually presented in a first-person perspective view and in real time.

The first commercial game to offer a first-person perspective of an interactive three-dimensional environment was the arcade game *Battlezone* (1980).[12] The player's point of view was that of a tank, which roamed a sparsely decorated landscape and fired upon other tanks (which were, in turn, trying to shoot at the player's tank). The other tanks could sneak up from behind, so a player had to be vigilant in watching and turning, to locate the other tanks first; off-screen action could be as important as on-screen action. *Battlezone* was also the first game to feature off-screen sound and events; sounds of the player's tank getting hit indicated an off-screen tank's attack, alerting the player to turn and fight. The first-person perspective increased the importance of off-screen space because it positioned the player within the space, subjectively, as opposed to the third-person "objective" view in earlier games.[13] This shift also allowed a more mature usage of off-screen space, and one closer to that of cinematic off-screen space.

In cinema, the understanding of a narrative may depend on a detailed understanding of the space it unfolds in, but this is not always the case. Indeed, some cinematic spaces—such as Rick's diner in *Casablanca* (1942)—function adequately within the narrative, but physically are not consistent enough to be reconstructed into a coherent space. Most video games, however, require players to know their way around the diegetic world in order to be successful in the game—multiple playings are almost always necessary. A knowledge of what areas have not been seen may lead to the discovery of a hidden room, and spatial orientation may be useful in solving puzzles, such as in the Selentic Age in *Myst*, in which the player must rotate radar dishes to pick up signals from other parts of the island.

With the development of 32-bit and 64-bit home video game systems, games involving three-dimensional interactive environments have become quite common, and computer games on CD-ROM feature increasingly detailed graphics in their 3-D environments (one need only compare *Doom* [1993], *Dark Forces* [1994], *Stonekeep* [1995], and *Quake* [1996] to see how much it has developed

over a three-year period). Navigation through a labyrinth is a large part of these games, and there are often books sold for these games which provide maps of the different levels. Frequently, however, there are maps of the spaces built into the games themselves which depict the off-screen space in highly simplified schematic form.

## 11. Represented or "mapped" spaces

As the size of the video game's diegetic world grew from one screen to several screens to intricate multi-leveled three-dimensional labyrinths, it became more important to provide the player with some visual representation of a conceptual map. These represented or "mapped" spaces became an on-screen representation of off-screen space; they were not spaces in and of themselves, but rather simplified schematic versions of spaces designed to orient a player or indicate important events occurring in off-screen space. For example, *Battlezone*'s visuals included a small radar screen which used a series of dots to represent enemy tanks in an overhead view, giving a player a 360° sense of the immediate surroundings. Some games use a map only to indicate a player's progress from level to level, as in the inter-level screens of *Warioland* (1995), but these provide little information for the actual play of the game. Some games, in which figuring out the maze is part of the objective, do not provide maps, and those that do can discourage their use (*Spy vs Spy*, for example, subtracts 70 points from a player's score for calling up the "help map" [see figure 4]). But quite often, these maps are designed to provide just enough information to keep a player interested, without giving too much away.

Typically, these orientation maps are iconic and contain very little detail. Some of these maps are even worked into the diegesis of the game; in *Myst*, there is a map of the island in the library which lights up various portions of the island as their marker switches are flipped (see figure 5). This map indicates that there is something behind the cabin which a player might have missed; the tall tree with the elevator in it (the angles of the views of the island that a player sees while moving about it are designed so that the tall tree can only be seen from certain vantage points on the island).[14] *Myst* also includes maps of various ages in the books in the library, which are useful in finding the secret rooms in the Mechanical Age, and finding one's way around the Channelwood Age.

Other games such as *SimCity* and *SimCity2000* (1994) are based entirely on maps, using maps as their graphics as well as informational purposes. Here, too, off-screen sounds are used to indicate events; in *SimCity*, for example, off-screen sounds of disasters can occur, and the game can be set to immediately bring these locations on-screen right after they are detected. Video games, then, have come full circle; whereas once their spaces were simple and iconic fields with little detail, today they can be so complex that low-detail maps of their spaces are far more complex graphically than any of the early games were.

Finally, off-screen spaces can be represented as unseen on-screen space. In some games in which exploration is important, such as Sid Meier's *Civilization*, unexplored areas of the screen remain blacked out until a player has moved into the area. In this sense, off-screen space could be in the middle of the screen; the player could circle around an area, not venturing into it, leaving it black. Once

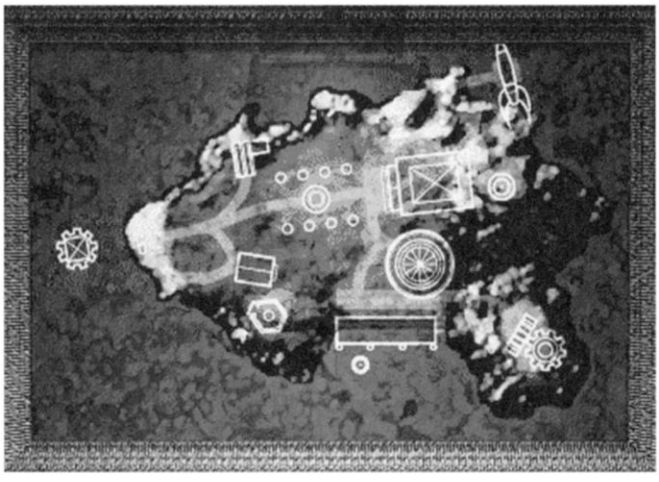


**Figure 5** The map on the wall of the library in *Myst*. The white outlines on the map only light up once the locations have been visited and their marker switches placed in the "on" position. The space of the map is both conceptual, orienting the player on the island, as well as physical, since it takes up space on the library wall.

this area is ventured into, its contents are revealed and appear on-screen; the black area having represented the unexplored space without revealing what was in it. Here, too, the notion "off-screen space" can be interpreted in two ways: it could refer to the land areas which lie outside the frame at any given moment while not including the black areas (which are still "spaces" even though their content is not shown); or, the blacked out spaces on-screen could be included in the term because their contents are not displayed on-screen, just like the areas lying outside the frame. It all depends on whether the space, or what is in the space, must be depicted in order to be considered "on-screen."

Video games continue to develop, as virtual reality systems (allowing real-time multiple-player interaction in a simulated three-dimensional environment) improve and become inexpensive enough to make their way to the arcade; Virtuality's *Dactyl Nightmare* (1992) was the first to appear, and others are following. As Michael Benedikt demonstrates in his book *Cyberspace: First Steps*, computer-generated representations of spatial structures are completely fluid, leaving the video game plenty of room to explore the representation of space.[15] New tools for home computer games and game systems are also being developed, like Apple's QuickTime VR, a scrolling kind of space mapped onto the inside of a sphere as it rotates, to give the illusion of being an interactive kind of space.[16] Gradually, films are joining video games in the realm of computer graphics, not only through the growing use of digital effects in film and the use of video clips and film language within games, but with films like *Toy Story* (1995), the first feature-length film to be completely computer generated. *Toy Story* was also released as a Super Nintendo game, the graphics of which, although much lower resolution, still manage to keep quite a bit of detail from the film's characters, showing just how much the gap between film and video game is closing. Actors, storylines, and cinematic conventions are making the crossover into video games, and many are the familiar titles, series, and franchises that can be found in both film and video games.

The use of space—on-screen and off—in video games is certainly linked to cinematic space, which was an important influence on its development. However, through combinations of the spatial structures mentioned above, video game space goes beyond cinematic space and shows the various possibilities for organizing space within a diegetic world, as well as broadening the sense of what a diegetic world can be. The structuring of diegetic space in video games in many ways has come to follow the precedents set by film, and has also revealed new possibilities of dealing with on-screen and off-screen space; as video games continue developing and film moves into the realm of computer graphics, film may, in some ways, begin to follow precedents set by the games. Much of the theory pertaining to cinematic diegetic worlds can be applied to those of video games, and likewise, the diegetic worlds of video games can reveal new possibilities for film. The cross-fertilization between these two media has occurred commercially, aesthetically, and technologically, and the two continue to converge. Whereas the cinema offered a window and positioned the spectator within the world it depicted, the video game goes further, allowing the spectator to explore that world and take an active role in its events.

If knowledge of how film operates on the spectator is still incomplete, consider how much more incomplete is the knowledge of how video games operate on players, and what their effects are. They already have been shown in a number of studies to shape people's behavior and outlook, and the breadth and depth of these influences are still being researched. We may also ask how video games are related to the cultures producing them, and what they say about those cultures. Video games have become well integrated into other cultural forms and media, yet perhaps overlooked as a cultural influence. As generations of children raised on video games begin reaching adulthood, how will society and the cultural milieu change?

And the medium of video games itself is still changing, and changing rapidly. When one considers the progress that has been made during the medium's first 25 years, it is enormous. Even film, another rapidly developing medium, was, for the most part, still black and white and silent after its first quarter century. Comparing *Pong* to 64-bit CD-ROM-based games, it is difficult to say what even the next five years will bring, much less what the effects of such future technology will be.

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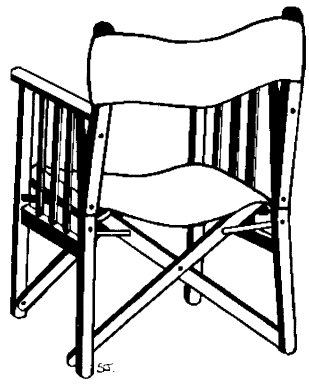
## NOTES

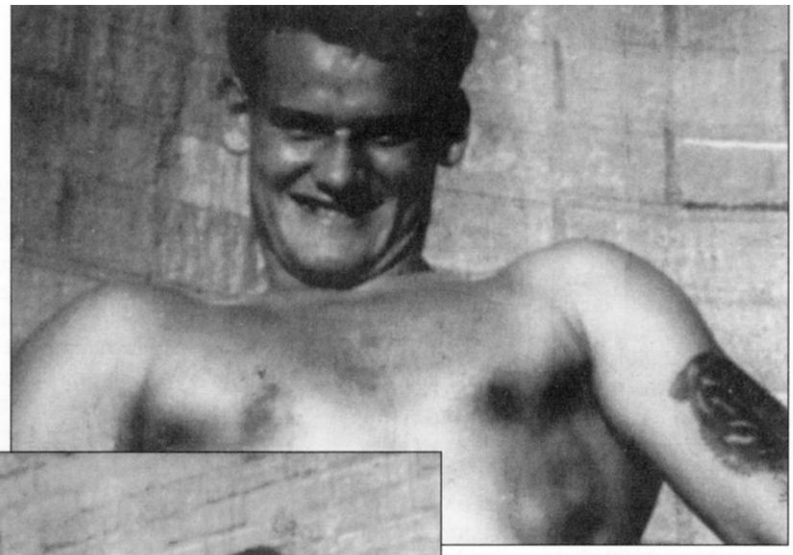
Besides the books listed here, Greg Chance's "History of Home Video Games Homepage" on the World Wide Web [http://www.sponsor.net/~gchance] was also very helpful, as was the Web pages of the Video Arcade Presevation Society [http://www.vaps.org/klovsrch.cgi]. And, of course, much of the data comes from playing many of the games themselves over the years.

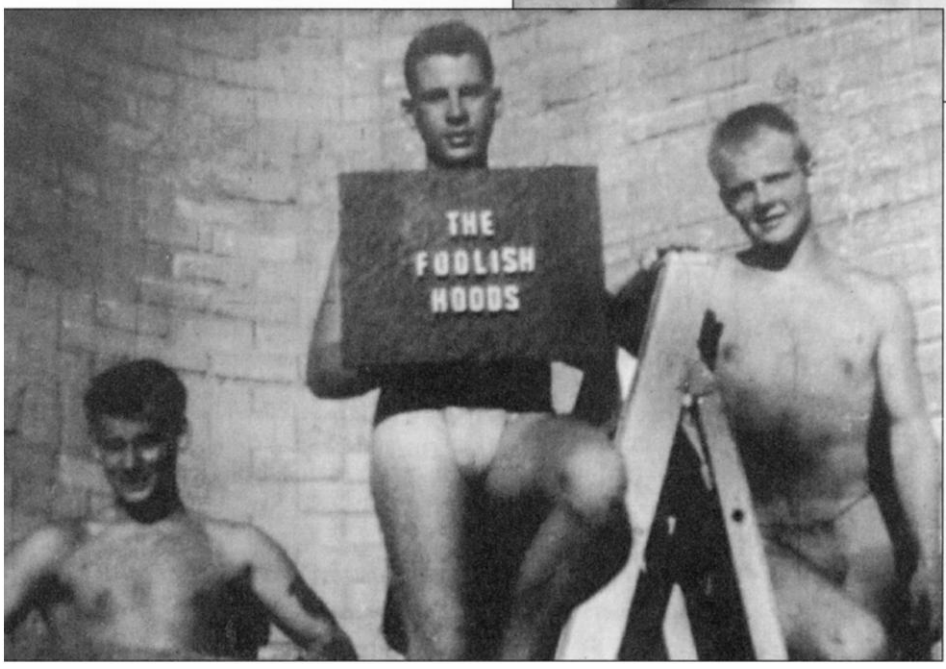
1. Besides all the arcade video games based on movies, there are many home video games based on film and television. For the Atari 2600 alone, cartridges based on movies include: *48 Hours, 9 to 5, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, China Syndrome, Deep Throat, Dragonslayer, E. T. The Extra-Terrestrial, Escape from Alcatraz, Excalibur, Fantastic Voyage, Friday the 13th, Ghostbusters, Ghostbusters II, Gremlins, Jaws, Karateka, Marathon Man, Poltergeist, Porky's, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, Star Trek III: The Search For Spock*, five different games based on *Star Wars* films, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The Day the Earth Stood Still, The Last Starfighter, Towering Inferno, Trail of the Pink Panther,* and *Tron Deadly Discs.*

   Game cartridges listed based on television shows include: *$25,000 Pyramid, A Game of Concentration, Dukes of Hazzard, Emergency!, Family Feud, Flipper, Jeopardy, Joker's Wild, Knight Rider, M*A*S*H, M*A*S*H II, Magnum P I, Mission Impossible, Password,* three different games based on *Romper Room, Scooby Doo, Star Trek, The A-Team, The Flintstones, The Incredible Hulk, The Price Is Right, Tic-Tac-Dough,* and *Wheel of Fortune.*
2. See Sullivan, George, *Screen Play: The Story of Video Games* (New York: Frederick Warne, 1983); Herman Leonard, *Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of Home Videogames* (Union, New Jersey: Rolenta Press, 1994); Kesten, Lou, "Arcade Classics," *Games* magazine (October/November 1989), pages 40-41; and Cohen, Scott, *ZAP! The Rise and Fall of Atari* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989).

   Although the video game itself grew out of mainframe computer games, home computer games using a television set were first patented by Ralph Baer, on August 10, 1970, as patent #3,829,095 (see Sullivan, *Screen Play*, page 17).
3. *Tout va bien* also has a number of long tracking shots which are visually very similar to scrolling video game graphics.
4. As for as the player-character's movement off the edge of the screen and back on at the opposite side, it is exactly like the on-and-off movement in spaces of type 3, except for the change of background, which indicates the new space.
5. Altman, Rick, "*The Lonely Villa* and Griffith's Paradigmatic Style," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Spring 1981), Volume 6, Number 2, pages 123-124.
6. Ibid., page 129.
7. Adams, Robert L., "D. W. Griffth and the Use of Off-Screen Space," *Cinema Journal*, Volume XV, Number 2, pages 53-57.
8. Burch, Noël, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Praeger, 1973), page 17.
9. The asteroids in Atari's arcade game *Asteroids* were vector graphics that passed over each other, superimposed on each other, and so could not be considered to be an example of Burch's sixth segment of off-screen space.
10. If one player's Spy enters the room the other one is in, the action appears on one of the screens, and the other goes blank, until the Spies are in separate rooms again; thus there can be times in the game where off-screen space (from either player's point of view) is not depicted on-screen. Likewise, *High Velocity* also merges its views when players are close together.
11. See Bordwell, David, "Space in the Classical Film," in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pages 50-59.
12. Prior to video games, flight simulators using computer animation offered first-person perspectives of interactive three-dimensional environments, but these were not commercially available for public use.
13. Text adventures created a first-person perspective verbally by describing what a player was seeing, hearing, feeling, etc. (although grammatically employing "you" in the text instead of "I"); but this is, of course, much different than a game with graphics.
14. When the elevator in the tall tree is running, it produces a periodic, metallic ka-chunk sound that can be heard even on other parts of the island; likewise, when the right plaques by the fountain are activated, there is an off-screen sound of water indicating that something is happening. Games, then, that have similar spatial structures as those seen in films can use off-screen sounds in a fashion similar to film.
15. Benedikt, Michael, "Cyberspace: Some Proposals," in Benedikt, Michael, ed., *Cyberspace: First Steps* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1991).
16. For an overview of the technology and how it works, see Milano, Dominic, "QuickTime VR: An Overview of Apple's Virtual Reality Tools," *Interactivity* (March 1996), pages 34-43.








Closing credits from *The Foolish Hoods*, a late 50s AMG film

*Jack Stevenson*

# From the Bedroom to the Bijou

## A Secret History of American Gay Sex Cinema

Gay cinema in America is today experiencing nothing less than a golden age. Gay film and video production is flourishing, while lesbian and gay film festivals are springing up in locales as disparate as Minneapolis, San Jose, and New Orleans. Gay themes are addressed in a plethora of both independent and Hollywood productions, while concerns about homosexual stereotyping in the cinema are forcefully debated in the mainstream media.

At a time when public viewing habits are so thoroughly dominated by a mainstream Hollywood aesthetic, gay cinema is one of the few subgenres of independent film to prosper. It thrives on a nurturing circuit of art-house screens and at film festivals attended by savvy, engaged, and adventurous audiences keyed in by sympathetic urban film journalists.

The development of gay film culture through the 80s and 90s is mirrored by the growth of Frameline's San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. Begun in 1976 as a storefront event, it has become the world's largest gay and lesbian festival. In 1995 the festival added a marketplace where a lineup of films sifted from 1,000 submissions was offered to bookers and buyers. Gay film had become not only hip but marketable as well. The 1997 program included a panel discussion for industry insiders entitled "Selling Out: The Marketing of Queer Cinema." Attendance jumped 48 percent over the previous year's, and there were numerous sell-out programs at the 1,550-seat Castro movie palace. A number of feature film debuts by directors whose short films had figured prominently in past festivals is the surest sign that the festival has become almost "traditional."

This relatively recent "legitimization" of gay film has come only after decades of struggle for the freedom to create, circulate, and access gay erotic

images—a struggle that has culminated in the freedom to view these images in the public environment of the movie theater. In this context, the history of gay erotic film is all about the journey from the private space to the public space, and as such it parallels the history of gay liberation itself.

Gay images appeared on film concurrent with the first "smokers" or "stags": ten-minute black-and-white silent 16mm films that began to circulate on an underground basis around 1915. Production of stag films continued into the late 60s until theatrical hard-core pornography—and later the emergence of home video—rendered them obsolete. Always strictly illegal, these stag films were shown after hours in fraternal lodge halls and sundry backrooms to decidedly straight male audiences. A clandestine late-night stag-film show, with the flickering projector beam slicing through a heavy cloud of cigar smoke, became a rite of sexual passage for many American males.

Male homosexuality in these films was almost nonexistent. According to a study made by film historians Arthur Knight and Hollis Alpert in 1967 (*Playboy*, November 1967), only five percent of all stag films produced between 1920 and 1967 contained male homosexual scenes and only 1.4 percent of all stag films were exclusively male homosexual; some or most of the latter were probably—as Knight and Alpert surmise—produced as exotica for straight audiences primed to have their liquor-soaked minds blown, or eager to test the forbearance of their fellows. One such all-gay film from the 1950s (without any credit information, ascertaining exact dates for these films has proved virtually impossible), *Three Comrades*, sports ambiguous intertitles that seem geared to distance intent from subject matter.

While lesbianism, as Knight and Alpert observed, occurred much more frequently at over 19 percent of the time, in such films as *Confidential Circus*, *Hycock's Dancing School*, and *No Help Needed* (all from the 30s), any search for authentic lesbian material made by women and for women is doomed by the fact that these images were constructed by men to serve male desire. At the conclusion of the episodic *No Help Needed*, for example, three women sitting on a couch passing porno photos around suddenly explode into a frenzy of clothes-ripping lust right on cue—acting out the male-fantasy stereotype of the insatiable nymphomaniac who grabs the nearest warm body, male or female. Here, as in the typical stags, lesbianism is employed as a male turn-on.

This dearth of gay and lesbian film pornography in these early years was primarily a matter of economics: there were no appreciable organized homosexual audiences in either a private or theatrical context, and since there was no market, there was no product. Gay images existed only as exotica within the heterosexual market. While viable markets for gay male material would emerge over the decades, genuine lesbian pornography as a commercial commodity and accessible subcultural aesthetic would not emerge until the 1980s, when a wave of lesbian fanzines, sex guides, and sex clubs (sometimes featuring lesbian strippers) began to champion pornography for pornography's sake, boosting a new generation of lesbian writers and film-makers into the limelight. Feminist film-makers, such as Constance Beeson, had dealt boldly with lesbianism in film before—Beeson most notably in her film *Holding* from 1971, but the approach used in this film was more naturalistic and vehemently anti-pornographic.

After World War II, access to gay sexual imagery on film became easier. Thanks to military-inspired standardization and mass production, 16mm movie equipment became much more affordable and available. In addition, postwar America was undergoing a period of liberalization; gay magazines like *Physique Pictorial* and *Dance* as well as physique photographs of tanned and oiled muscle-flexers began to be commercially disseminated above-ground.

Physique photography soon begat a nascent "physique cinema," produced strictly for the home market. Physique cinema would flourish through the 50s and 60s in several minor variations, the earliest being the "posing" or "posing strap film," featuring muscle-flexing strongmen. Wrapped in a look-but-don't-touch aesthetic, posing films—direct offshoots of the still photographs—were strictly one-way fantasies. They often featured seemingly slightly nervous and confused (and undoubtedly, in some cases, heterosexual) musclemen awkwardly taking instructions from offscreen directors. They appeared self-conscious and ill at ease as they offered themselves up as targets for the viewer's unrequited gaze. "The static quality of a succession of stiff physical poses," writes film historian Thomas Waugh (*Cineaction*, Fall 1987), "frozen in a moving medium, seemed to

exaggerate all the more the pretense and artificiality of the mask."

Minimal narratives began to appear in some films as the joy of watching endlessly flexing musclemen began to wear thin. *The Cyclist* (1949) by Richard Fontaine (real name Richard Dusbabek) is often cited as one of the first to display a basic plot line and character motivation By 1953 a Cincinnati-based company called Spectrum was advertising mail-order posing and narrative films in the back pages of muscle magazines. In 1954 a Detroit film-maker, Bob del Montegue, produced a relatively ambitious narrative entitled *Greek Gods* that is fairly well known among gay cineastes today, in part because of the attention it received from Alfred Kinsey.

Another major development in postwar gay cinema came from a very different direction. In 1947 the 20-year-old Kenneth Anglemyer, aka Kenneth Anger, shot an intense and violent 14-minute autobiographical rough-trade fantasy entitled *Fireworks*. Steeped in anxiety, trauma, and pain, and rich in metaphorical fantasy, "it was considered pornography for the time," remembers Anger's friend Ed Earle (Bill Landis, *The Unauthorized Biography of Kenneth Anger*, p. 45) and it was two years before Anger would dare to show it publicly. *Fireworks*, along with *Fragment of Seeking* (1946), by Anger compatriot Curtis Harrington, marked the beginning of the American gay Underground/ Avant-garde movement. Unlike physique cinema, which was a celebration of surface, a purposeful negation of any deeper psychosexual exploration, the Underground avant-garde was committed to exactly that deeper goal. The two were poles apart.

Distribution and exhibition, as always, were key to making any appreciable cultural impact, but with both movements struggling against a homophobia still endemic in society at large, there was no way to successfully reach out to a larger public. Circulation of underground films was confined to fledgling distributors like Creative Film Associates, a film-makers' collective, and Amos Vogel's New York City-based Cinema 16, founded in 1947. Such distributors serviced a small circuit of film clubs, university film societies, and the occasional art-house as the near-revolutionary concept of film as a creative, artistic, personal expression struggled to take root in a culture where film was considered to be primarily a commercial enterprise.

Censorship at this point was effected not only by societal norms and official censorship boards, but by Eastman Kodak, which had a monopoly on developing 16mm film stock. Kodak developers who found questionable nudity or sexual content on processed film often destroyed the film (or took it home). Anger lost a 1949 film, *The Love That Whirls,* this way. Countless other rolls of film, from risqué home movies to serious art, were similarly destroyed. As late as the early 60s, exploitation film-maker Jack Hill called a lab to see where his film was and was told it was where it belonged—in the garbage can.

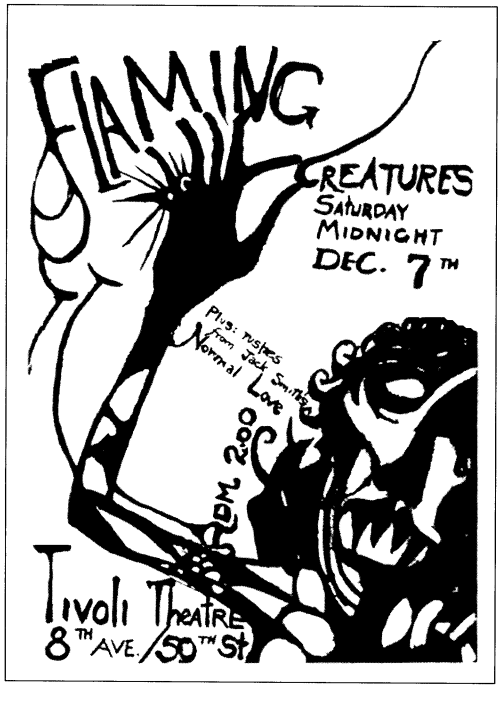
Physique cinema reached its peak in 1958, when Bob Mizer's Athletic Model Guild (AMG), already renowned since 1945 as a photo and magazine publisher, began film production. Over the next ten years, Mizer's output of 16mm silent black-and-white shorts ran as high, by some estimates, as 1,500 titles. (While AMG favored the 16mm format, its less prolific competitors often sold shorts made with cheaper 8mm film, which had gained popularity in the early 50s as a home-movie format.) The films arrived by mail in unmarked brown-cardboard mailer boxes, and could be viewed on either projectors or portable hand-cranked viewers sold by the studios. Gay film as a consumer item, if not yet as a theatrical experience, was born here in the late 50s with AMG.

AMG's main contribution to physique cinema was the wrestling film, which soon eclipsed both the posing and narrative forms. Shot mostly in Mizer's high-walled Hollywood studio courtyards where he was able to utilize available light, these films are typified by slap-dash set designs that shook or threatened to collapse when the inevitable knot of brawling young lads careened into them. Minimal plot setups introduced stereotyped masculine characters who quickly came to odds and soon, stripping down to jockstraps, were whirling in a frenetic, nearly nude mass of torsos and splayed limbs as fake punches and chops were thrown and pretend chokeholds applied—the aggression often belied by the grins of guys having fun. There was lots of body contact—this was what AMG excelled in supplying. A low-rent "star culture" applied. Actors were always identified by real names as film buyers sought out their favorites. Most of this non-actor talent sported tattoos, implying recruitment from the lower echelons of the military or reform schools.

Themes were culled from the lore of all-male social culture as athletes, prisoners, sailors, and laborers became involved in wild horseplay and

volatile disputes. Cowboy-and-Indian motifs were also used, and prompted some rare countryside locale shooting. Leopard-skin backdrops and plaster Grecian pillars made frequent appearances on the set, while costuming might consist of cowboy hats, genie turbans, or leather jackets. The films ran a wide gamut of ambitiousness. One AMG short merely shows two boys wrestling about; another, *College Initiation,* (from the late 50s or early 60s) features a large cast of young men who come to blows after one frat boy is forced to eat shaving cream—bullying and sadism being recurrent themes. In one of the more interesting films, *The Foolish Hoods*, a meek, bespectacled bookworm reading an anthology of poetic drama is taunted and abused by two cigarette-puffing, leather-jacketed juvenile delinquents. The bookworm strips in acceptance of the challenge, neatly folding and laying aside shirt, tie, and dress slacks. The two hoods strip and soon all three are brawling in jockstraps, at one point banging into what is suddenly revealed to be not a brick wall but a paper facade. The bookworm triumphs, leaving the toughs hog-tied and beaten. He coolly dresses and departs, going back to the page he marked in his book.

In *Bathroom Athletes*, statuesque greaser-hunk Joe Leitel plays the vain, posturing body-builder who gets itching powder dumped in his shorts by two young pranksters. A bathtub, sink, and medicine cabinet have been dragged out to decorate the courtyard in a bizarre attempt to evoke a locker room. A wildly itching Leitel discovers the capering, laughing "brats," takes them both at once over his knees and spanks their raised buttocks. The campiest, trashiest of all the AMG titles is, rumor has it, one called *Muscles from Space,* which this writer has never had the fortune to view.




In the early 60s a new company, Bruce of Los Angeles, entered the physique-cinema field. Bruce pioneered the "danglie" subgenre of the posing film, which now encompassed a range of theme characters, not just bodybuilders. Danglies were shot without the jockstrap and sold under the table, while the version with jockstrap was sold by mail order.

While AMG captured market share of home-use-only physique cinema in the early 60s, the gay underground merged with the more formalized and pluralistic New York-centered Underground movement (for which *Film Culture* and the *Village Voice* served as publicity organs) and made a very public splash with two films destined to provoke scandal: Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*. The 60s would prove to be a decade of tumultuous change for both straight and gay sex cinema as judicial and economic barriers crumbled under a surging tide of sexual liberalization.

Largely completed in 1962 but not released until 1963, Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* soon crossed over into the commercial sexploitation market as theater bookers engaged in the time-honored practice of trying to disguise art as porn. At Chicago's Plaza Art burlesque theater, for example, *Scorpio* was co-billed with *Fireworks* and a straight, soft-core Radley Metzger import from Europe, *The Fast Set* (and a troop of strippers thrown in for live entertainment).

In March 1964, a Los Angeles theater manager showing *Scorpio* was arrested for lewd exhibition, and the film became enmeshed in a publicized and highly absurd courtroom battle during which boy-scout leaders, anthropology professors, ministers, and rabbis testified. *Scorpio* was ruled obscene because of a brief snippet of frontal male nudity, a verdict overturned on appeal to the California State Supreme Court. The trial had been great publicity for the film, enhancing its controversial reputation, and by May 1966 it was playing a hit run at New York's Bleeker Street Cinema and being praised in the mainstream press.

Also in 1966, Andy Warhol shot his breakthrough film, *My Hustler*, a gay comedy of manners that was his most popular film and his most straightforward handling of a homosexual theme. *My Hustler* was successfully launched that year on a midnight run at the Cinematheque, an Underground screening room on West 41st street, and in July 1967 crossed over to the commercial sexploitation market with a run at the Hudson Theater in Times Square.

In 1968, on the opposite coast, a young theater manager and film student named Mike Thomas shot a gritty 16mm feature entitled *The Meatrack* that depicted the adventures of a troubled bisexual hustler adrift in San Francisco. Occasionally referred to as "the poor man's *Midnight Cowboy*," *The Meatrack* was the most ambitious if unevenly realized gay feature film thus far—a strange hybrid of underground and sexploitation approaches in its unflinching recreation of life in San Francisco's gay bars, cheap hotels, and bedrooms.

Another important advance in gay movie culture also occurred in 1968, when the Park Theater in Los Angeles began screening the short film packages of Pat Rocco, an ex-nightclub singer and still photographer who was the first to openly make gay soft-core films and successfully exhibit them theatrically. The Park, in turn, was the first theater to commercially exhibit films with extensive male nudity and gay themes. Quietly, an era was launched.

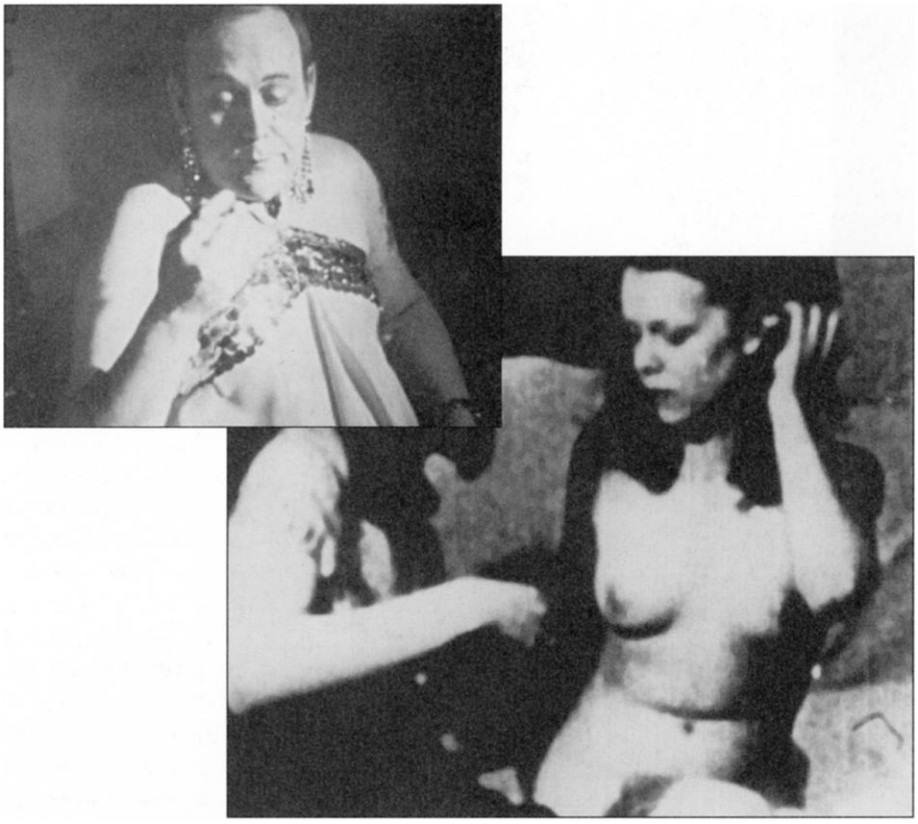
Rocco's films were innocent, romantic idylls devoid of the violence and sadism that so often figured in gay film. *Discovery*, Rocco's 25-minute romantic boy-meets-boy from 1968, was shot entirely in Disneyland with nothing more explicit than a nude kissing scene on Tom Sawyer's island. By contrast, comercial heterosexual porn at this point was in its much more vulgar and explicit split-beaver phase. In going to extremes, the Underground was, as usual, way ahead: *Christmas on Earth*, made by Barbara Rubin in 1964, was, for all its artiness, as bisexually explicit as a movie could get (and was suppressed by the New York City police for that reason).

The commercial viability of Anger's *Scorpio Rising* and Warhol's *My Hustler* and *The Chelsea Girls* had clued exhibitors to the fact that there was an audience for theatrically exhibited gay films that transcended the insular loft/art-gallery crowd. Additionally, the Underground's daring treatment of sexual themes was generating massive publicity as articles on the movement proliferated in everything from girlie mags to literary periodicals. In 1969, *Scorpio Rising*, co-billed with *The Trick*, *Revenge of the Tritan*, and *Baskets*, played a run at New York City's biggest gay theater, the Park Miller, an old movie palace with three balconies on 43rd Street, while further uptown, Andy Warhol's loony Western parody, *Lonesome Cowboys*, was enjoying a smash engagement at the 55th Street Playhouse—an art house that previously specialized in Japanese films and was soon to become New York's main gay porn venue.

At this point precious little separated the Underground "art" film-makers from the commercial sexploitationist pornographers, at least in the view of censors and moralists unattuned to (and uninterested in) the radically divergent aesthetics involved. Indeed, both camps were, for different reasons, engaged in the battle for absolute screen freedom. Middle America, fearing a tidal wave of smut, raised the alarm.

The last barricade was breached in late 1969 with the appearance of gay hard-core pornographic features. This spelled commercial doom for the type of soft-core romance peddled by Pat Rocco, and at the same time it defused the underground's most potent weapon: its scandalous allure. Films like *Flaming Creatures*, *Scorpio Rising*, *My Hustler*, and *Lonesome Cowboys* had always been art films masquerading as sex films. Their days as porn impostors were over.

The landscape was transfigured almost overnight as "beefcake" or "meatrack" productions, euphemisms for gay hard-core porn in the trade, began commercial exhibition at about the same time as straight hard-core features, albeit on a separate and smaller circuit. By late 1971, better-produced and more dramatically ambitious hard-core films began to appear in response to the lack of quality in the very first hard-core titles. On December 29, 1971, Wakefield Poole, an ex-dramatist who had once stage-managed the Phyllis Diller show on television, opened his $8,000 hard-core feature, *Boys in the Sand*, at the 55th Street Playhouse and grossed $400,000 on a smash run. Poole had unveiled the film with a slick and artful advertising campaign unheard-of for a gay—or straight—hard-core movie, placing ads and earning reviews in mainstream publications like *After Dark*, The Sunday *New York Times*, and *Variety* (which announced, certainly prematurely, that now "there are no more closets"). *Boys in the Sand*



*The Meatrack* (1968) (top); *No Help Needed* (bottom): an example of early 30s lesbian-related footage from a stag film.

earned model-star Cal Culver celebrity status and prefigured the concept of "porno chic" popularized by *Deep Throat* in 1972. Poole's contributions to the relative legitimization of gay hard-core film were revolutionary: for the first time, a movie had credits and a real name was on it.

Hard-core gay films with diverse sensibilities began to emerge, most notoriously Fred Halsted's *The Pledgemasters*, which played Manhattan in 1971, and his 1972 follow-up, *L.A. Plays Itself*. Both films featured the kind of sexual brutality and violent S&M that drove many in the gay community to condemn him for portraying gay sex as a cruel debasement. The films also provoked police raids—hitherto confined to straight porn houses—that would shut down some of his shows. *Lodestar* was another controversial hard-core picture of the period, depicting Jesus coming down off the Cross to perform homosexual acts. *Get That Sailor* played on the age-old theme of lonely guys in the Navy, while *Creation*, a low-budget take on the dawn of mankind (no less), featured a raunchy orgy scene. These were raw, decadent times for both gay and straight pornography, rendering most of what would evolve later comparatively restrained.

By late 1972 a circuit of about 50 gay hard-core porn theaters existed throughout urban America. Most sported low-profile frontages and some operated under marquees that read "Art Theater," which was what they had actually been before. By 1973 there were at least 12 such venues in New York City alone.

In 1972 a strange thing happened: an art film opened in a porn theater, instead of the other way around. For want of any other ideas, New Line Cinema opened John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* (not a gay film per se) in Boston's South Station Cinema, a renegade gay hard-core house booked by maverick exhibitor George Mansour. Waters' cast was furious at the choice; actor David Lochary went to check out the audience reaction and found more action in the bathrooms than on the screen. At the filmmaker's insistence *Pink Flamingos* moved to a midnight slot at New York's Elgin Theatre and began its rise to cult fame and art-house booking heaven.

In February, 1972, the Jaguar production and distribution company arrived on the scene and raised both the technical quality and the narrative content of gay hard-core feature film-making. Jaguar gave directors like J. Brian, Ignatio Rutkowski, and ex-soft-core maestro Gorton Hall a start and ensured

*The Meatrack* (top); *The Foolish Hoods* (bottom)

a steady flow of product. Foremost among this new crop of directors was Barry Knight (*Devil in the Flesh*, *Blue Summer Breeze*), who as a TV-commercial producer had created some of the most excessively idyllic of the dreamy, soft-focus Salem cigarette ads. Working with Jaguar, directors fought for and won the right to rehearse dialogue with actors, use a camera crane, and take five or six days to shoot a feature film instead of the usual one. In the ultra-low-budget world of gay porn, where "stars" could be seen cruising Sunset Boulevard, such seemingly minor luxuries were significant.

By the mid-70s, commercial gay porn feature film-making was out of the closet, but there was nowhere for it to go—it came up against the same genre limitations that doomed creative development in all forms of hard-core pornography. Gay underground film, however, made new advances in the 70s, thanks in part to film-makers from West Germany like Werner Schroeter, Rosa von Praunheim, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Perhaps the most innovative work was being done by San Francisco painter-turned-film-maker Curt McDowell, who was busy blurring the borders between art and porn—and between gay and straight—in new and creative ways. McDowell broke rule number one by mixing explicit gay and straight sex acts together in his 1975 hard-core haunted-house feature film *Thundercrack!*, and the following year he incorporated explicit gay porn into his short avant-garde documentary *Loads*. In *Nudes—A Sketchbook* (1975–76), he filmed his sister Melinda having straight sexual intercourse in such a beautiful and sympathetic (and thoroughly explicit) way that the result was much closer to art than pornography. Although unrepentantly gay, McDowell objected to being ghettoized as a gay film-maker and demanded the freedom to draw on all ranges of sexuality in his work. And although he had a heartfelt love of prurient film pornography with its graininess and zoom shots, he would also attempt the inconceivable: to free explicit sexuality from the onerous implications of "pornography" by depicting it as an innocent and wholly natural act to be celebrated rather than commodified.

By the mid-80s, gay commercial porn cinema had once again retreated behind closed doors as the emergence of home video allowed private accessibility to product, while the AIDS crisis prompted a police shutdown of public gay-sex institutions and effectively brought about the suppression of gay porn as a public experience. Gay sex cinema, always closely calibrated to the format technologies and economics of changing times, and exist-

ing in both defiance of and in coexistence with the broader public morality, had passed through its most interesting phases as an agent of gay liberation. It was spent as a (sub)cultural force and reverted once again to a mere consumer commodity. There were more pressing battles to be fought.

Today gay culture, especially gay publishing, has made a quantum leap forward from the early 70s, and with numerous opportunities to create and express, the collective gay identity has assumed a deeper dimension. Moreover, priorities within the gay community have changed. The right to purchase and enjoy gay pornography has assumed less importance as a marker of gay identity. No longer could a single film have the revolutionary impact that *Boys in the Sand* had in 1971. Pornography is no longer the forbidden fruit of previous decades, and although celebrity porn stars like Jeff Stryker will continue to emerge, such status is no longer the chic commodity it was in the early 70s.

Gay film audiences today, liberated from the oppression of earlier times, view the artifacts of vintage gay cinema with an affectionate nostalgia motivated by contradictory impulses. They treasure the sentiments and images of a simpler, bygone era but are keenly aware of the crushing prejudices and discrimination of those times. These sentiments are encapsulated in a review of *The Meatrack* published in a Seattle newspaper in June 1994 to mark the film's revival at the Pike Street Cinema. "I have a collection of old gay porno novels from the Fifties and Sixties, with titles like *Pretty Man*, *The Gay Trap*, *Mr. Queen* and *Savage Stud*," wrote journalist Dan Savage.

> These books are full of homophobic clichés—self-hating old queers, killer drag queens, unfeeling hustlers—and I absolutely love these books. Late at night I curl up with one and feel transported to the pre-Stonewall world of my gay forefathers. For a few hours, I live in this thankfully bygone era, and era of oppression, self-hatred and the delicious feeling of being a very, very bad boy. *The Meatrack* was filmed in pre-Stonewall San Francisco (1968) and is one of my dirty, self-hating novels put on screen.

Other lost nuggets of gay film history have been unearthed and revived. In 1992 the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival programmed an enthusiastically received trailer retrospective of Barry Knight's early 70s hard-core features entitled "The Way We Were." The festival had also previously mounted a well-received retrospective of AMG wrestling shorts. Most recently, and most provocatively, rare 35mm prints of three early Fred Halsted films, *Sex Garage* (1972), *LA Plays Itself* (1972), and *Sextool* (1975), were screened. The near sold-out show drew heavily from the local leather scene, and for one night the ornate Castro movie palace was turned into a rough, funky, and lawless early 70s porn house.

These imperfect artifacts of vintage gay cinema—underfinanced, often crudely shot in secretive circumstances, and furtively distributed—were not encased in the timeless amber of "great art" and were thus dated almost instantly. While this dated quality enhances their luster as objects of nostalgia, it can also leave the modern filmgoer somewhat confused as to what all the fuss was about, particularly regarding the more celebrated works of the Underground. To modern, emancipated audiences, Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* hardly seems like the milestone of gay liberation that its revered status as the first artistic gay film would suggest. By the same token, contemporary audiences unattuned to the significance of works such as *Flaming Creatures* and *Scorpio Rising* tend to find the former purely incomprehensible and the latter entertaining pop-rock camp—oblivious to the factors that made these films so scandalous within the context of their times.

Today a discernible breaking-down of barriers has been achieved, liberating film-makers to some degree from the compartmentalization of strict genre classification and affording them more creative freedom. Gay film-makers are no longer automatically considered soldiers in the battle for gay liberation, but can be creative, apolitical artists making movies that play to wider audiences and which are not even necessarily "gay films." Gay directors such as Greg Wild, Ela Troyano, Bruce La Bruce, Gregg Araki, and Barbara Heller have used this freedom to address a wide array of subjects in a diversity of styles. "Gay film" itself is becoming increasingly hard to define—a good sign.

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# Reviews

## Gabbeh

Writer/director/editor: Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Producers: Khalil Doroudt-Chi, Khalil Mahmoudi. Cinematographer: Mahmoud Kalari. Music: Hossein Alizadeh. New Yorker Films.

Of the Iranian film-makers whose work has reached the United States, Mohsen Makhmalbaf is the probably the second best known. First place would go to Abbas Kiarostami, whose most recent works (*Through the Olive Trees* and his screenplay for Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon*) impressed viewers with their upbeat humanism. By contrast, the U.S.-shown films of Makhmalbaf have until now been downbeat and/or aggressive. *The Peddler* (1987), though fictional, presents an astonishingly grim picture of life in Tehran. (For details, see my review in *FQ,* vol. 43, no. 3 [Spring 1990].) *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989) uses jagged editing to tell the story of a photographer of the Iran-Iraq war who becomes unhinged because of his experiences. And in the offbeat documentary *Salam Cinema* (1995), Makhmalbaf himself takes an aggressive tack as he auditions people who want to be in movies.

*Gabbeh* (1996) makes a quite different impression. "This is the first film in my fourth phase," said Makhmalbaf (unaggressively) after the press screening at the1996 New York Film Festival. Unlike his earlier U.S.-shown films, *Gabbeh* is set entirely in rural areas amid traditional ways of life.

A *gabbeh* is a carpet woven on a personal theme without a prearranged design. As the film begins, an old man and woman come from their rural home with a *gabbeh* to wash in a stream. The design shows a young man and woman riding side by side on white horses. A young woman named Gabbeh appears as if from the carpet and tells its/her story. It's clear that this is the story of the old couple when young, their memories awakened by the washing of the carpet.

Gabbeh is the oldest daughter of the leader of a clan of nomadic shepherds, and she is courted at

Gabbeh (Shaghayegh Djodat)

a distance by a man on a white horse. But she will not be permitted to marry before her uncle Abbas finds a bride. After he does so, Gabbeh still has to wait until her pregnant mother gives birth. Then her youngest sister dies in a cliff fall while chasing a stray lamb. Finally Gabbeh slips away to meet her suitor, who has brought a second white horse, and they ride off together. Her father rides off in pursuit with a gun, and we hear two shots. The film ends with the old couple as Gabbeh's voice explains that her father didn't really shoot them: he merely said he did to frighten her sisters.

Only one scene recalls the startling dramatic effects of Makhmalbaf's earlier films. After the death of the little sister (which is not shown), Gabbeh expresses her grief in a long whirling run that the camera follows in a tight framing of her upper body. Elsewhere, Makhmalbaf not only keeps his camerawork simple but at times chooses a structure and a style that suggest the hands-on procedures of making a *gabbeh.*

Almost immediately after Gabbeh has emerged from the old couple's carpet and talked of her horseman suitor, the film veers into an apparent digression. Uncle Abbas visits a tent school and takes over from the teacher in order to demonstrate colors, reaching out to grab red from flowers, yellow from the sun, blue from the sky, and so on. Makhmalbaf creates this sequence with straight cuts from Abbas's hand in front of each object to his "dyed" hand in the tent—using the postproduction technique that comes closest to handcrafting. Along with later realistic scenes of wool being dyed by hand and woven on a simple frame, the sequence makes the viewer aware that the *gabbeh* carries not only a visual but also a tactile and kinesthetic memory.

Except for the sister's death, *Gabbeh* has none of the darkness or unease of Makhmalbaf's earlier films. The two most salient characters, Gabbeh and Abbas, are likable, and no one is villainous. True, there's some ambiguity about the ending. The film begins with the old couple bickering about who is to wash the carpet, and after young Gabbeh appears, the husband is more interested in her than in her older self. At the end, he asks Gabbeh to help him wash the carpet because the old woman has left, but then Gabbeh is revealed as the old woman. The couple appear to be reconciled.

It's tempting to see Makhmalbaf as moving closer to Kiarostami, whose recent films focus

*Gabbeh:* weaving the tale of the carpet

Gabbeh
(Shaghayegh Djodat)

extensively on likable characters who help one another. After all, Makhmalbaf willingly entered Kiarostami's world in the latter's *Close Up* (1990), based on the true story of a film buff who impersonated Makhmalbaf and convinced a family he would make a film about them. Both Makhmalbaf and the impostor play themselves, and the film ends with all-around reconciliation.

But that rapprochement theory misreads both Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf. Kiarostami's style can be summed up as quiet realism. In his fiction films he may opt for sweetness and light, but he doesn't try to force it on a documentary. In the full-length *Homework* (1989), he interviews first- and second-graders at a boys' school in Tehran. His questioning reveals among other things that virtually all parents beat their sons for making mistakes in homework. The one parent who appears on camera, a father, criticizes the current educational system at length for stifling creativity: children should be taught to think, he says. In its quiet way, *Homework* is almost as grim as Makhmalbaf's *Peddler.*

While Makhmalbaf has turned away from the grim and melodramatic aspects of his earlier films, in both subject matter and style he remains as provocative as ever. Since the Iranian censors banned two of Makhmalbaf's earlier films for inappropriate subject matter, he might well have retreated to a safe topic with *Gabbeh*—but it, too, was banned for nearly a year. (Because the Iranian censors control release schedules, they can ban a completed film simply by failing to assign it a release date.) At the New York Film Festival press conference, Makhmalbaf said that the idea behind the film was that women's choices are "stationary," and in requesting permission to make the film he had told the censors it was a documentary on nomadic life. (That ruse, he added, can be used only once, and he plans to make future films in neighboring countries, while continuing to live in Iran.)

There is nothing documentary about *Gabbeh.* The supporting cast of screen nomads consists of people who now lead a settled village life. Gabbeh is played by a college graduate, one of the 3,000 men and women who responded to the "cattle call" for *Salam Cinema.* That film, too, was not as naturalistic as it appeared to be: Makhmalbaf has hinted that at least some of the aggressive mind games he played on the auditioners were staged to show the power structure of film-making. His use of artifice to skew realism becomes transparent in *A Moment of Innocence* (made just after *Gabbeh*), ostensibly an attempt to reconstruct Makhmalbaf's attack on a Shah-era policeman in 1974, with the real-life policeman taking part. (The censors also objected to that.) *A Moment*'s exhilarating redemption of fact by fiction cannot possibly be mistaken for documentary realism.

To Western eyes, however, the remote settings and exotic cultural trappings of *Gabbeh* look convincing enough, and even the narrative might be at least as real as any TV drama "based on a true story." The provocative artifice of *Gabbeh* stands out most clearly in its use of color. The one Iranian

film I've seen that bears some visual resemblance to *Gabbeh* is *Pomegranate & Cane* (Sayyed Ebrahimifar, 1989), in which a photographer who encounters a dying old poet reads a book of his poetry and imagines his whole life in a series of dreamlike vignettes. The use of color is exquisite.

Exquisite is not the word for *Gabbeh*'s color, which reflects the hardness of the nomads' everyday life as much as their exotic settings. Green pastures, surrounded by stark mountains and covered at times in snow, are for trudging through; a sapphire river demands the assembling of rafts; a stream purling through a meadow serves as a washtub. The raw fantasy shots of Uncle Abbas grabbing colors from land and sky point two ways: to the nomads' manual labor, as hands churn woolen skeins in buckets of dye and then weave rainbow filaments across carpet frames; and also to times of emotion, like the dozens of carpets scattered on the grass around Abbas and his bride, the white horse of Gabbeh's love, and the blurred pastels of her dance of grief for her sister.

Above all there is the continual reappearance of the *gabbeh*, whose simple patches of color both encapsulate and contrast with the events of Gabbeh's youth. The dyed wool reminds us that those events too are an artifice, not just of Makhmalbaf's but also, within the narrative, of old Gabbeh's memory and imagination, stirred by the sight of her carpet in sunlight and running water. She embellishes her past with fantasy, turning Abbas into a magician and her suitor into a distant mysterious figure who calls to her with a wolf-like cry.

Some mystery remains at the end. The bickering between old Gabbeh and her husband, like his nostalgia for her youth, could be a sign of affection as much as its opposite. Several times, Makhmalbaf shows us the *gabbeh* in the fast-flowing stream, which may either brighten or bleach its colors. He leaves the viewer to consider what the stream of time has done to the couple's happiness.

■ William Johnson is the New York Editor of *Film Quarterly*.


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Geoffrey Rush as the adult David Helfgott (above); Noah Taylor as the young prodigy in *Shine* (right).

## Shine

Director: Scott Hicks. Producer: Jane Scott. Writer: Jan Sardi. Cinematographer: Geoffrey Simpson. Music: David Hirschfelder. Fine Line Features.

The Australian biographical movie *Shine*, one of last year's sleeper hits, gives its prodigy-crushed-by-fame protagonist the glamour treatment. As an adolescent, David Helfgott, an Australian pianist of Jewish-Polish origin, sees his precocious beginnings cut short by a nervous breakdown. The film recounts this tragic downfall, and the remarkable recovery some 30 years later, with enjoyable panache. Unfortunately, however, director Scott Hicks stages almost every scene for its superficial dramatic worth. He rarely delves into the complexities of the material, preferring to skim the surface of its emotionalism and thematic implications. A supposedly bold work, *Shine* keeps too steady a course: its central flaw lies in its reluctance to be anything more than just ordinary.

*Shine* can, however, be visually bold. One of the film's most evocative scenes has the young Helfgott giving a strenuous rendition of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto no. 3 for a competition held when he's attending London's Royal College of Music on a scholarship. That piece holds a special value for him: not only is it a particularly challenging composition he had never attempted before, but it is also one his domineering father has long insisted he play.

Hicks creates a taut atmosphere from the tension between awe at Helfgott's impassioned performance and fear that the boy may be pushing himself too far. The color black predominates: the piano; Helfgott's long, messy hair; the rest of the room. Helfgott seems both enshrouded in the darkness and possessed by it. The ambiguity is that we don't know whether he is in control of his environment or if this environment is controlling him. Hicks frames the action in close-up shots, urging us to identify with his protagonist. During the climactic moment of the performance, he takes us inside Helfgott's head, presenting the moment as Helfgott is experiencing it. The music is cut and all Helfgott (as well as we) can hear is the thumping of fingers on the piano. He is so absorbed by his playing, he goes through the motions mechanically, disassociated from the feelings of the music. By striving for perfection, he's dehumanized himself. Drenched in sweat, his wet hair falling over his face, he seems a savage: a beast of art.

From a dramatic perspective, *Shine* is at its most interesting during its London sequences. The city appears nobly archaic, with its imposing monuments and the Royal College itself, an elitist palace where Helfgott finds a refuge from his father's despotism. At the Royal College, the young David finds a new male role model in Cecil Parkes,

a professor (played with his usual charisma by Sir John Gielgud) kinder and more sensitive than his domineering father, but just as determined to push the young boy to the heights. Staring at David from his office window, Parkes firmly remarks that he's seen "moments of genius" in the boy, as if the kid were his prized trophy. At the competition concert, Parkes is enthralled: proud to have awakened his protégé's genius, and still ignorant of the effect this event is having on the boy.

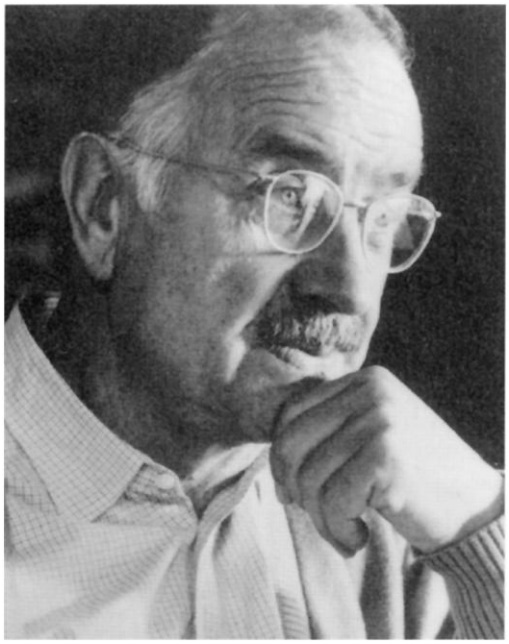
What also distinguishes *Shine*'s London sequences from the rest of the picture is the lack of constraint in Hicks' directing. Unlike the single-minded emotional drive guiding much of the rest of the picture, Hicks here allows his work the freedom to elicit more than one response from the viewers. Helfgott's playing of the Rachmaninoff is both exciting and dangerous: the work of a young artist draining himself of all life while evoking the beauty of an artistic work. During the more elaborate passages, it's as if he were unravelling his layers of insecurity and agony—purging himself of all repressed fears. On the one hand, he does dehumanize himself, but parallel to this self-inflicted torment is an exploration of his emotional core through art.

Much of the rest of *Shine* tends to revert to a more simplistic cinematic form. Hicks' aesthetic consists of treating almost every image as if it were a postcard, contrived to please the mesmerized eye with the superficial beauty of any scene or filmed event. The result is often an unvarying tone dictated by the mundane prettiness of every shot. Hicks consistently films Helfgott with a dubious cinematic awe, whether the pianist is speeding toward a breakdown or rising above the traumas of his past. In one scene Helfgott is in the bath being whipped by his father, in another (much later) he's jumping, barely dressed, on a trampoline while listening to music. In each instance, Hicks frames the shot for sensational effect. In the first, Helfgott is out of frame when being whipped, while his father takes center stage; our attention is centred on the aggressor rather than on the victim, so that pain of the action is evacuated while its shock value remains intact. When Helfgott bounces on his trampoline, he's a bird-like free spirit. Never mind the dozens of emotional and psychological problems that pushed him into such a state—Hicks captures Helfgott in a tilt-up shot as he leaps towards the sky, glorifying his otherwise unenviable state.

Geoffrey Rush's (Oscar-winning) acting is skilled, but it lacks sensitivity. Stuttering frenetically, his head bobbing constantly, his eyes gleeful, and his back and shoulders hunched in a humble and unassuming pose, he presents a series of mechanical gestures, all executed rather duly and dispassionately, the uncanny technique running a little dry on feelings. It isn't Rush's fault: Helfgott has been conceived almost solely to win over our sympathies. The adult Helfgott, an emotionally crippled neurotic, still child-like and lost in fantasy, is made to look cute; he's adorably disconnected from reality. His stuttered speech and eccentric manner are intended to be comical, yet also seductive. He wins the heart of a woman. He wanders into a pub and begins to play grandly on the piano and the customers are thrilled. The problem isn't that it's erroneous to portray the artist as being impassioned and creative beyond the conventional borders of sanity, but that it's misleading to contend that the artist is a happy and yet hapless joker. *Shine* is about a man who's illuminated with artistic genius, and it implicitly denies that such fire can be anything else but unprovocative and affable.

The opening sequences in Australia set the stage for Helfgott's eventual breakdown. Helfgott's father, Peter (Armin Mueller Stahl, in an admirable performance), is rendered somewhat banal by his constricted role throughout the early half of the movie—the evil authority figure restraining the hero in his march towards success. But the script and Stahl also play close attention to the more sympathetic nature of Peter's passionate self; the same self which, tragically, turns oppressive with startling outbursts of rage. He cares for only two things: success and music. He obsessively wants David to be the most gifted pianist possible, and the most gifted at the music he chooses for him. Because of his father's relentless pressure, David suffers a breakdown; but isn't it also this same pressure which pushes him to take on the artistic challenge of the Rachmaninoff?

The father has an almost pathalogical protectiveness and conservative belief in family values. Wanting to shelter his son from the supposed dangers of the outside world, he forbids him to go to London because it would break up the family. The film never goes so far as to present him as a sadist, yet it also evades his essentially ambivalent character—we are invited to forget that the man who almost broke David paradoxically formed him as well. In presenting Peter as nothing more than a bully, an obstacle



Armin Mueller-Stahl as Helfgott's father (left);
Lynn Redgrave as Gillian, with Geoffrey Rush (above).

David has to overcome, his menace becomes commonplace, his unrecognized complexity betrayed.

Both Cecil Parkes and Peter represent, in different ways, and with their different mitigating factors, the iniquity of patriarchal authority. Helfgott's only true companions are women: his wife, Gillian (Lynn Redgrave), and friend, Katherine Prichard (Googie Withers). The implicit logic is that the Oedipal David must flee the evil image of the father by protecting himself with the comfort and protection of maternal love (in the form of his wife and his friend: his mother is, not surprisingly, almost completely subdued by her husband). The waif-like child turns into an equally waif-like adult, consoled and cajoled by a wife rather than a mother. He resumes his musical career, though one wonders if the character we see in the movie will ever play the Rachmaninoff so impeccably again.

In this light, *Shine* is about a young boy forced to sacrifice everything for the high ideal of art, only later discovering the simpler, admittedly commonplace, pleasures of life. But *Shine* sentimentalizes the tribulations of young David, as well as the hopefulness of his recovery. His accumulation of neurotic habits—his shyness around a girl, his bed-wetting tendencies, his fear of his father, his mechanical repetition of Peter's key-phrases ("I have to win")—are coordinated in an effort to convert him into a movie hero: he's a character from a fable, one we're meant to identify with, and also one who doesn't yield much insight into human nature. The film's purported authenticity consists of offering us a classic fairy tale in perfect harmony with our cultural heritage (superficially, Helfgott stretches from Dickensian folklore to Stephen Dedalus, passing through Hermann Hesse and the feel-good American rags-to-riches success story). If *Shine* seems to strike all the right notes (for its many admirers), it's only because those notes have been picked out of our familiar background: the irritating fact is that this Australian film is in fact very Euro-American.

The many Australian pictures released some 15 to 20 years ago, including Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) and Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* (1979), dealt with Australian culture and Australian history. The films were rooted within specific landscapes, a world remote from our own, and yet they didn't exploit their exotic quality as a commercial selling point. I don't mean to imply that *Shine* was necessarily conceived with the intention of pleasing our North American sensibilities, but I do contend that its striking success in finding a large and enthusiastic audience in the U.S. owes a lot to its skilful merchandising of a familiar theme, even if it is placed in an unfamiliar context.

■ Julien Lapointe is the culture editor of the *McGill Daily* in Montreal.

# Annual Film Quarterly Film Book Survey Part II

## American Laughter

### Immigrants, Ethnicity, and 1930s Hollywood Film Comedy

By Mark Winokur. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. $29.95.

On the most general level, Mark Winokur's *American Laughter: Immigrants, Ethnicity, and 1930s Hollywood Film Comedy,* by drawing on a wide range of materials in contemporary film theory and cultural studies, explores a complex and important question: "How do the events on the film screen explicate, and how are they explicated by, events on the larger cultural stage, when both arenas are defined as much by omission as by praxis" (4)? More specifically, Winokur looks at how immigration and ethnicity become represented in disguised form in American movies, particularly comedies, of the 1920s and 1930s. In his own words, the book constitutes "an attempt at a hermeneutics of ethnicity and immigration," seeking both to analyze their significance and use them as "tools for reading" (5).

In our contemporary cultural situation, as multicultural approaches to American literary and film studies are refocusing attention on new questions and texts, Winokur's efforts are welcome. He has also chosen a difficult but riveting period to probe. The 1920s not only witnessed the solidification of the studio system, establishing the film industry as a powerful oligopoly, but it also saw the passage of federal legislation restricting immigration. Such restrictions were the culmination of nativist efforts to stop the substantial flow of immigration, particularly from Eastern and Southern Europe, in the decades after 1880, and to promote what defenders called "100 percent Americanism." Given this hostile climate for immigrants and the extremely widespread popularity the movies had attained by the mid-1920s, it's not surprising that the studio heads, most of them first- or second-generation Jewish immigrants, shied away from films that treated immigrants or immigration as central to their narratives. As Neal Gabler showed in *An Empire of Their Own,* the movies were, ironically, a medium in which immigrants anxious about their heritage taught the public what Americanism was all about. And film history has seemed strangely silent about how immigrants "used" movies from the mid-1920s onward, after immigration had been restricted and movies had become widely accepted by the middle class. This book aims to probe these paradoxes and silences in film history.

Winokur first approaches his subject with an introduction that outlines his theoretical approach to immigration, ethnicity, and cultural studies. He follows his theory with four substantive chapters. The first connects American film comedy to American literary humor, emphasizing how much of earlier American literary humor from Thomas Morton and Ebenezer Cooke onward treated important issues of assimilation into the landscape of the New World and alienation from it. Winokur argues that homologies exist between American literary comedy and American film comedy in part because they "mature at historically analogous moments: during a sudden and rapid influx of immigrants into an alien and alienating landscape" (37).

The next three chapters each treat ethnicity and immigration in relation to different subjects in American film comedy and end with a discussion of a single film; the topics are Chaplin and *Modern Times,* the Marx Brothers and *Duck Soup,* and the William Powell/Myrna Loy team in the *Thin Man* series.

Chapter 2, "Charles Chaplin and the Comedy of Transformation," argues that although Chaplin is by no means the only silent film comic to use comic transformation, "he is the only one whose life thematically connects physical transformation and the fairy-tale transformation of immigrant into American" (76). One of Winokur's most interesting arguments in this chapter is that Chaplin's tramp persona serves "as a mechanism for repressing ethnicity's primary characteristic for an audience ambivalently resentful at this suppression of difference" (90). The chapter also contains an interesting analysis of *Modern Times* which argues that the film "is about the oppression of the individual by industry and society" and the imaginative strategies the individual can use to counter that oppression (124).

"The Marx Brothers and the Search for the *Landsmann*" reads the Marx Brothers' films as in part an attempt to found a *Landsmannschaft,* an organization which helped immigrants assimilate to the new culture by enabling them to associate with other new immigrants and by emphasizing "a memory and history separate from American memory and history" (129). Acknowledging the Brothers' willingness to satirize everyone and everything, Winokur describes their satire as "the fantasy of a dispossessed ethnic who, though he cannot imagine himself as a ruler, also cannot imagine that the world could be run any way but badly by anyone concerned about the appearance of gentility. The unrealized alternative is a world without rulers, only brothers or landsmen" (158). Further, their fantasy is one which assigned "shame to the cultural hegemony that imposes shame on the suppressed minority" (158). The consistent attacks on dowagers played by Margaret Dumont and on all respectable figures of authority in their films constitute a withering satiric attack on respectability and gentility, rooted in an immigrant's ambivalent situation.

Chapter 4 moves on to the *Thin Man* series, focusing on both the screwball comedy and on the evolving star personas of Powell and Loy. At least since Andrew Bergman's *We're in the Money,* the screwball comedy has been read as a cultural unifier, an "imploder" rather than an exploder of culture. Winokur offers an interesting twist on this notion. He notes correctly that both Loy and Powell began as character actors, often playing decidedly ethnic roles, but that by the time of the *Thin Man* series they had become the embodiments of mainstream culture. Yet Nick in particular can move comfortably between patrician and lower-class ethnic worlds. Winokur argues that the series, like screwball comedy generally, depicts tensions between "acquiring money and acquiring culture, between the persistence of origins and the insistence of the present, between assimilation and acculturation, and between opposing cultural milieux and classes." And in so doing, the *Thin Man* films can be read in part as "strategies for overcoming problems of assimilation in the face of a culture that only partially and minimally acknowledges the ethnic's presence as part of the perceived cultural mainstream" (195).

How successful is the book? At its best, it offers provocative reflections on the importance of immigrants and ethnicity in understanding American movies in the studio era; Winokur's analyses and speculations go beyond the simpler attempt to register how ethnic characters have been represented in American film. Yet I have two reservations. First, at times I thought that Winokur's attempts to integrate contemporary theory into his analysis led to unnecessary digressions, as during the discussion of the mirror sequence in *Duck Soup* or the attempt to link Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* to slapstick comedy. Although interesting, these sections seemed to me less successful in developing the book's central concerns. Second, the book's social theory seems unclear about the relationship between ethnicity and what Winokur terms "mainstream culture." At one point the author argues that mainstream culture "is at all times consitituted, rather than contributed to, by immigrant and ethnic cultures"; ethnicity is not simply a construct, it is "the defining construct" of the mainstream (10). By posing immigrant/ethnic culture against "Anglo-Puritan" culture, and rejecting the second in favor of the first, Winokur, I believe, both sets up a false dichotomy and develops a conception of dominant culture or mainstream culture which is as problematic as a traditional approach which equates American culture solely with Anglo-Puritan culture. These reservations aside, however, *American Laughter* offers a fresh new perspective on American movies and American culture in the 1920s and 1930s: the author convinced me of a central claim that "if one wishes to understand American film, one must understand something about movement, immigration, and ethnicity" (22).

CHARLES MALAND

■ Charles Maland teaches in the English Department at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

# Bad Women

## Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema

By Janet Staiger. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. $18.95.

Janet Staiger's *Bad Women* is a bold attempt to write feminist film history to include American Studies. Admirably not in the same mold as film historians who focus on film language and/or institutions but ignore context, Staiger analyzes the "relationship of cultural and social conditions in changing America to moving pictures" to show how a "repeal of reticence" occurred in representations of women (4). Subject to regulation in the Progressive Era by a middle class divided in its views, such representations focused on the "new woman" as a cultural sign. Although her evidentiary base is selective and consists of plot summaries of four best-sellers, several one-reelers, and three early features "well known by scholars," Staiger gives provocative readings. But her attempt to contextualize these works is less successful due to an unsystematic reading of American history, a conflating of middle- and working-class experience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when class and ethnic (not to mention racial) differences were extremely marked, and broad generalizations about social change that is acknowledged as contradictory, but that was less schematic and more gradual than she describes.

The new woman, as Staiger reminds us, represents a complex social phenomenon. Staiger might have differentiated, therefore, between an older generation of new women, including college-educated career women in homosocial relations and married women pursuing social and political activism, and a younger generation of flappers destined for companionate marriage. Granted, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a radical who called for women's economic independence—certainly not a goal of suffragists in the organized women's movement—but she was also critical about consumption and the sexual revolution. The line between new women and Victorian women, who were not stereotypes but boldly expressed themselves in a "female world of love and ritual," to quote Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, is rather blurred.

Although the new woman was mostly middle class, Staiger relies on the work of Kathy Peiss, and thus conflates the experience of middle- and working-class women when a differentiation between classes—not to mention ethnic variations among workers—would be more precise. She reproduces John Sloan's "Fun, One Cent" (1905) as a representation of new women in the public sphere, but Sloan shows lower-class women dressed like Gibson girls giggling in an arcade. What conclusions do we then draw about the behavior of successive but different generations of middle-class women in public? Staiger also generalizes about the function of these women in the home—the private sphere as a unit of consumption rather than production—when their role was essentially one of social reproduction.

Staiger's generalizations about the new woman are not unrelated to lack of specificity in defining the middle class, at times equated with the bourgeoisie. Richard Hofstadter, whom she cites, is informative on the middle class (in a work published in 1955), but so are recent studies by Mary Ryan, Stuart Blumin, Daniel Horowitz, John S. Gilkeson, Jr., Elaine Abelson, Cindy Sondik Aron, and Olivier Zunz. Such works are enmeshed in historiographic debate so that a single definitive study does not exist. Staiger is right to emphasize that the middle class was not a homogeneous group, but this issue needs to be explored more fully. White-collar workers as the "new" middle class, for example, were subject to increasing feminization and proletarianization in the early twentieth century, as Harry Braverman and C. Wright Mills argue. Such developments led to stratification, resulting in a lower middle class that patronized places of commercialized amusement also frequented by the working class. The genteel middle class, however, did not rub shoulders with the lower orders.

Staiger is more precise about historical actors—elsewhere described as "some radicals," "some doctors," "some writers," "many women," "many individuals," "many reviewers"—when she discusses early film censorship in relation to New York City politics. She gives a detailed and interesting account, partly based on primary sources (including trade journals and periodicals), of encounters between the film industry and its regulators. Although her discussion of censorship as an example of dissension within middle-class ranks or Progressive reform is on target, she then misses her mark by schematically dividing antagonists into "religious and moral reform leaders" on the one hand and "progressives" with ties to "social scientific institutions, universities, and settlement work" on the other. Jane Addams and Jacob Riis are labeled progressives, but Addams has been criticized for middle-class attitudes toward the poor and Riis, who worked with religious groups, for outright surveillance. Because Staiger is writing about reformers who were active during the Progressive Era, her use of the word progressive is confusing. So is her underestimation of the extent to which reformers were

inspired by the forces of modernization and evangelical Protestantism. (Advertising coopted but certainly did not supercede Protestant tenets before the Jazz Age, as is claimed.) As Richard McCormick and others argue, Progressivism so defies generalization that its usefulness as a concept has become problematical.

Progressive reformers, in particular the response of the social hygiene movement to prostitution, play a crucial role in Staiger's account. She makes a rather large claim by arguing that the "cause" for the "repeal of reticence" or "change in hegemonic representations [of women] was the pestilent effects of venereal disease, spread by prostitutes. After decades, even centuries, of tacit acceptance, prostitution became a focal point for reform" (44). Staiger therefore focuses on early features involving prostitution or the commodification of women, namely *Traffic in Souls* (1913), *A Fool There Was* (1915), and *The Cheat* (1915). Despite stereotyping of the Victorian woman in contrast to the new woman, Staiger gives an insightful reading of the female characters in these films. She characterizes as types the psychologized vamp, the Victorian wife, and the wife's sister as a new woman advocating divorce and sexual equality in *A Fool There Was*. She points out that Edith, the new woman who sells herself to the "Oriental" in *The Cheat* (elsewhere a character is described as a "Chinaman") is, on the other hand, represented as a single character instead of the antithesis of the virtuous woman. But Staiger's claim that Edith redeems herself as a new woman rather than as another version of the sentimental heroine is debatable. A reading of *The Cheat* in relation to Cecil B. DeMille's other films shows that just a few years later, his extravagant new women spent even more money without a twinge of conscience. What remains unexplored is the extent to which the film, given its views on women and miscegenation, might also be read as part of the cycle of paranoid white slavery films.

Indeed, the way in which issues of class, ethnicity, and race intersect with and clarify those of gender in these films requires a more integrated discussion of text and context. For example, the family of William Trubus, the head of the prostitution ring masquerading as a reformer in *Traffic in Souls*, represents the nouveaux riches scorned by the middle class and eager to marry into more established social circles. The daughter violates etiquette by receiving a suitor while clad in robes more appropriate for the boudoir—an image that calls for speculation about the role of women in establishing genteel middle-class conventions. Or consider Theda Bara, launched into stardom in *A Fool There Was*: A dark woman associated with tropical scenes, she is waited on by an African-American maid. And one of her desperate castoff lovers has an Asian manservant. Although the virtuous wife also employs an Asian male, a white maid attends to the needs of the family, especially the child. Because the dark prostitute who lures the American ambassador from wife and child has been linked to the vampire, these insinuations about the pollution of the body politic reveal much about an era of nativism, eugenics, and racism.

As Staiger convincingly argues with respect to the texts she analyzes, it was no surprise that the aesthetics of melodrama and realism, the dominant ideology, and the regulation of film coincided. Yet melodrama and realism were both cultural forms that were to some extent informed by the ideology of the sentimental culture of nineteenth-century middle-class women. Staiger acknowledges that the four best-sellers or "lurid literature" she discusses are related to earlier conventions in women's fiction and to (Harlequin) romances. Indeed, cultural forms as well as social change recycle the past and thus represent developments that are contradictory and warrant judicious use of language. The same could be said for representations of the new woman, in contrast to the Victorian woman, as a harbinger of a new age. Staiger's work motivates us to rethink these issues and is thus a provocative contribution to feminist film history.

SUMIKO HIGASHI

■ Sumiko Higashi is the author of *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era.*

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## Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars

### Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema

By Juan A. Suárez. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996. $15.95.

Historical memory seems most manageable when it appears in the form of periodization, and certainly some of the most recent work in gay male history enjoins with the impulse to demarcate the past through an insistence upon the "twenties," "sixties," and "seventies" as meaningful abstractions. From George Chauncey's *Gay New York* to Robert Corber's *In the Name of National Security* to Lee Edelman's *Homographesis,* we sense the impulse to restore a history to gay consciousness through the shorthand of

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the decade. The regulation of history through the decade has become so pervasive as not to be noticed: the 50s now stand in fascinating repression (think of Tennessee Williams, or of *Strangers on a Train),* the 60s the moment of "dangerous" sexualized voices (John Rechy's *City of Night*) and the 70s the explosive libidinal economy of the popular (the members of *Village People* in *Can't Stop the Music).* I had occasion to wonder about the effects of this kind of history writing while reading Juan A. Suárez's *Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema,* a vibrant and important contribution to the field of queer studies and film history.

Like the above works, Suárez's book employs a rhetoric of the decade, and, again like the above works, the ideology of the decimal allows him to explore how purportedly "marginal" cultural expressions in fact were constitutive of the centralized metropolitan culture of the period. What emerges from this book, however, is a thought-provoking challenge to gay male history, and how the recuperation of such historical memory disturbs the too-stable categories in which we sometimes allow our sense of the past to reside. Suárez's work forms a significant rethinking of a crucial moment of convergence between film history and queer history, because the project highlights the challenging and revolutionary consciousness which same-sex male subcultures produce for themselves in industrialized societies. As Suárez's work demonstrates, the "sixties" is not necessarily the same as the *queer* "sixties."

Suárez situates the films of Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, and Andy Warhol in relation to the convergence of popular culture, avant-garde, and modernist cultural dynamics in postwar American film culture. For Suárez, the New York underground of the 1960s heralds a new moment in the dialectic of the political project of avant-garde artistic production and the expanding power of consumerism and the commodity. In the book's first three chapters, he gathers together various arguments.

The first chapter organizes critical responses to mass culture, from Clement Greenberg's animosity toward kitsch, Peter Bürger's work on the avant-garde and its seemingly apolitical cousin, high modernism, through Kluge and Negt on the public sphere. It is not entirely clear how this more general taxonomy of the avant-garde and modernism helps the argument, and the second chapter, which offers a reading of the American underground in relation to its European avant-garde predecessors, attempting to align them as much through a comparison of the dynamics of production, distribution, and exhibition as through any thematic or stylistic similarities, does not always indicate why one might expect such exacting homologies between European and American cultural avant-gardes. It is in the most insightful of the book's exploratory essays, "The 1960s Underground," that Suárez limns the New York cinematic avant-garde's project as one that was "underground" as much in relation to the particular contemporaneous critical discourses that sought to name it (Fiedler, Sontag, Wolfe, McLuhan) as in terms of the popular culture which Smith, Anger, and Warhol were commenting upon. Suárez argues that often the pleasures found in these directors' films had to withstand being named as popular themselves (or tending toward the popular), because the camp pleasures of popular consumption formed so much a part of metropolitan gay life at that moment. Given their restricted budgets and smaller audiences, it is difficult to construe any one of these film-makers as *popular* in any sense of the word.

I found myself wishing that Suárez's claims about the theoretical turf he opens up were bolder, because the project has larger implications than he sometimes allows it. The animus toward popular culture expressed so often by more orthodox critical projects (Marxism among them) has the effect, if not the intent, of relegating many of those subjects marginalized by popular forms *and* Marxist critique (women, queers, African Americans) as twice-made fools: taken in by the ideological operations of the mass form and yet unable to find themselves in any helpful way reflected by such popular representations. The rich and delightful chapters that move out of this theoretical framework, where Suárez examines *Scorpio Rising*, *Flaming Creatures*, and *My Hustler* most prominently, make clear that Suárez is situating the works of queer movie-makers Smith, Anger, and Warhol in terms of the sullied popular because they found more galvanizing critical materials with which to articulate (indeed, invent) their artistic visions than in any leftist critique. This point is no small one in that it helps to explain why queer historians have so infrequently engaged with the critical project through which to understand the relations among commodity, value, and social difference.

The emphasis on materialist historical method allows Suárez to ask new and vitalizing questions of the films he addresses. In his essay on Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising:* "Pop, Queer, or Fascist? The Ambiguity of Mass Culture in Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*," Suárez carefully organizes a reading of the film that is the most helpful and provocative commentary I have yet seen. Satisfied neither with those readings of the film that insist on its queer utopian dimensions nor with those that emphasize *Scorpio*

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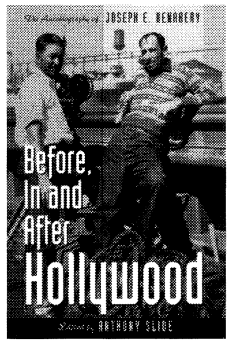


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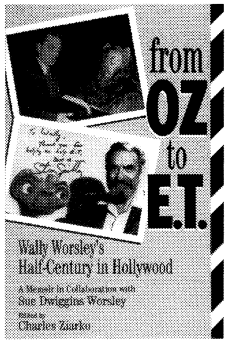


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*Rising* as a form of subcultural document, and adamant that we attend to the film's movement toward fascist iconography, Suárez points to Anger's famously dizzying montage as a commentary on the death-driven longings of commodity fetishism. This essay underscores the importance of understanding that Anger is not attempting to demonstrate in any singular way that bike boys are fascists, that fascism is "homosexual," that pop music is naive. Rather he suggests that the relations among homoerotic longing, the thanatopic iconography of bike/leather subcultures, and the masochist aesthetic expressed in girl-group music and Elvis are imbricated in a larger framework—namely the one from which avant-garde, modernist, and pop practices emerge and make possible. Most critics have shied away from the uncomfortable implications of *Scorpio Rising* (barring Susan Sontag, who famously decided in her commentary on fascism that it was homosexuals who seemed to keep its styles alive) and Suárez's encounter with the film sent me back to look at Anger's masterpiece yet again.

One question that haunts Suárez's project is its sense of the "gay identities" in the title. Although we must quickly admit that all writers who position difference, of whatever kind, within their work must struggle with the naming of identity as they simultaneously move to interrogate it, there are some ways in which I think Suárez's work would be better served by not always assuming that the ontological status of gay identity is quite so stable and unchanging. As his readings of the movies of Smith, Anger, and Warhol make visible, the spirit of the historical moment in which they worked as film-makers seemed less one about the pursuit of new identities than one that sought new pleasures and new articulations of desires, all the while encountering prohibitions and censorship in regard to the namings of homosexuality. The complicated strategies to avoid such nominations, as found in each film-maker's work, would undercut the impulse to gather them under too monolithic a sense of what makes them "homosexual," "gay," or "queer." I mention this because I have frequently had to explain to gay friends and colleagues what's "gay" about a Warhol film–and I would hazard that this means that recuperative attempts to historicize Warhol as an avatar of current identity politics are going to have a tough go of it.

Further, while there seems little doubt that there was a significant shift from the "subjective" preoccupations of earlier American gay avant-garde films (in the dream state and fantasy as metaphors of film, and vice versa), what Suárez notes as the movement away from "point-of-view shots, or such devices as anamorphic lenses, dissolves, and superimpositions"

is not helpfully asserted as a trajectory in which "Anger's fast montages and Smith's long handheld takes" are indications that they shot "in fairly straightforward ways." The straightforwardness of their films is never readily apparent, any way one approaches them, and indeed these preeminent stylists of the cinema would probably balk at such a description. It seems more helpful to emphasize that the apparent simplicity or crudeness, depending on which critic one talks to, found in the films of Anger et al. was a rejection of one style of film-making in favor of another–and we also shouldn't forget that these film-makers were not intent upon developing an aesthetic of utility so much as seeking to forge new creative visions which took their energies from the popular. If such an undertaking demanded the occasional appearance of "cheapness," so be it, but it's a cheapness that always arrives with a certain grand (and often camp) gesture. For the most part, though, Suárez's readings of the films are elegant and to the point.

As I opened with the problem of decades in so much recent queer theory and history, it is worth emphasizing the rich and provocative approach to the film culture of "the sixties" that Suárez brings. Unlike so many rehashings of that decade, Suárez's project reminds us that the vitalizing questions with which these film-makers struggled (Is popular cinema as monolithic as it has customarily been rendered? Who owns history? Is there a gay male gaze?) abide with us still. This helps to explain how remarkably fresh and dynamic these films remain. Seeing any of the works of Smith, Anger, or Warhol through the lens of Suárez's project, we begin to realize that the "sixties" are less a descriptive or heuristic naming, and more an ongoing queer political and cultural enterprise. For Suárez's project, which forms a part of that enterprise, we can be glad.

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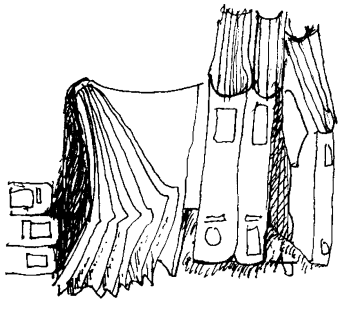

# Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film

## Film as an Emotion Machine

By Ed S. Tan. Trans. Barbara Fasting. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996. $59.00.

Emotion is one of the least understood elements of cinema. What are the bases of the medium's emotional appeals to viewers? What is the structure of the emotional experience that viewers undergo when watching a movie? How does the cinema cue emotion in the viewer? Outside of subjective and anecdotal accounts, precious little work on such questions has been conducted in film studies. Ed Tan's rich and important book is a valuable and timely exploration of these fundamental issues. Tan offers a complex account of the psychology of film in reference to the emotional experiences of its viewers. While he offers it as a theoretical account, it is informed by a wealth of empirical evidence, demonstrating that theory need not remain abstract and speculative, but can be enriched through a vital connection with supporting data.

Tan marshalls abundant experimental evidence in support of his claims and measures this evidence against some postulates of traditional film theory and theories of human emotion. Because of the book's extensive empirical base and social science methodologies, its intellectual orientation and manner of argumentation may seem unfamiliar to more humanistically trained film scholars, and the book's publication by a house that specializes in social science research may cause film scholars to overlook its availability and importance. This would be a shame, because Tan has constructed models of the emotional psychology of film viewing and of the emotional cueing mechanisms of film structure and narrative that are illuminating and have potent explanatory force. Tan focuses on the traditional feature film, marketed as entertainment, and he argues (sympathetically and non-pejoratively because, departing from the norm in film theory, he does not view emotion with suspicion) that viewers watch these films in order "to experience emotion as intensely and as abundantly as possible, within the safe margins of guided fantasy and a closed episode." He stresses that a pragmatic contract exists between the makers and viewers of such films. Each is required to do something. The film-maker shapes form so as to cue emotion; the viewer comes prepared to invest sustained interest (in following the narrative and responding to the depicted events) in the finished product.

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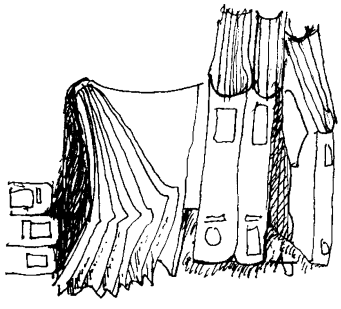

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Tan treats interest as an emotion, and finds that it is the primary and foundational emotion that cinema cues for the viewer. For Tan, interest is the viewer's desire to acquire knowledge and certainty about the narrative's outcome and total pattern. Tan treats this stance and experience (interest as fascination) as a cognitively inflected affective state, sensibly distancing his position from prominent structuralist/cognitive theories that regard the viewer's processing of cinema or narrative in general as a problem-solving activity. The idea of problem-solving is problematic for Tan because, in the first place, with popular movies there is little likelihood of the viewer's failing to complete the pattern formed by the narrative and, in the second, the characters and events on screen are not abstract. They are connected to the viewer's affective concerns, that is, their empathetic involvement in the screen world. Tan thus convincingly argues that "the cognitive component of the interest is totally overshadowed by the affective component. Moreover, it is often difficult to distinguish between the cognitive and affective sources of uncertainty created by the film, while experientially they are inextricable."

The heart of the book is devoted to a detailed discussion of interest as a structure whose affective rhythms are sustained by the way in which viewers project possible outcomes onto the narrative and receive gratifications from the manner in which these projections are verified or disconfirmed. Tan explicates this structure of interest in terms of its interpenetration of cognitive and affective components. He devotes a chapter to the way a film's narrative events cue the viewer to evaluate these in terms of generic cognitive schemes that are socially based and therefore shared among viewers, and he devotes another chapter to a discussion of how the viewer's response to screen characters operates by mechanisms that also inform the viewer's responses to people in everyday life. Some of these mechanisms are "innate releasers," capable of evoking a direct affective response to people that bypasses cognitive intervention. Discussion of these is especially relevant to an appreciation of how character typing works on-screen. Other person-perception mechanisms involve the shared schemas of social stereotype, and Tan points out that these, too, are affectively charged. "When someone fits into an existing person schema, then not only the meanings that are inherent in the schema are invoked, but also the affect that has been attached to the schema by previous experience."

Tan concludes with an extended consideration of the organization over time of the affect structure of the feature film. In terms of the interplay of viewer emotions of long and short duration, he explains how the temporal aspect of film is a structural trigger of emotion. Here as elsewhere, Tan emphasizes the rational and pleasurable nature of the viewer's experience, and this strikes me as an overdue dose of healthy-mindedness in our discussions of cinema. Rejecting the postulates in film theory of a "tragic" viewer motivated to watch movies as a means of coping with an irreparable loss or lack, Tan stresses that film watching is a hedonic activity. "Indeed," he wonders, "why would anyone want to see the film as an opponent in the first place? . . . A more rational strategy would be for viewers to get all the illusions out of the film that they can because of the pleasure this provides and, not least, for the emotions themselves."

Tan's account is valuable because it dispenses with the usual hermeneutics of suspicion that inform most film theory discussions of the viewer's experience, and, by doing so, it attends to emotion in the real sense of the gratifications derived by everyday viewers of commercial movies who seek entertainment. Tan explains how the entertainment film works as an emotion-generating machine. His study attends chiefly to the narrative structures (characters and situations) of popular film, and the next area of appropriate focus would be to explicate the emotion-cueing properties of specific features of audiovisual design. In the meantime, as presently configured, his account is complex, data-driven, and written from the standpoint of social science research. It will not, therefore, find a natural audience or constituency in film studies. But it deserves a wide reading and an even wider acceptance in our field for moving the discussion of emotion in cinema to the needed next stage.

STEPHEN PRINCE

■ Stephen Prince is the Book Review Editor of *Film Quarterly*.

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## A Fine Romance

### Five Ages of Film Feminism

**By Patricia Mellencamp. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995. $49.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.**

The title of Patricia Mellencamp's *A Fine Romance . . . Five Ages of Film Feminism,* refers, as she tells us, to the Dorothy Fields/Jerome Kern song Ginger Rogers sings in *Swingtime* which expresses the frustrations of an unrequited desire. Mellencamp sees these lyrics as emblematic of feminism's relationship to Hollywood movies, a relationship simultaneously fraught with fascination and exasperation.

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Written with passion, conviction, and considerable wit (there are many places in this book where Mellencamp made me laugh out loud), *A Fine Romance* is a meditation on dominant cinema's obsession with romance and the ways in which feminist film theory's chief concerns have both enabled and constrained creative responses to that obsession. Central to Mellencamp's argument is the notion that romance—described as the belief that one's ultimate definition comes from a relationship with another—has been disastrous for women, and this informs her analyses of a wide variety of films, ranging from those of classic and contemporary Hollywood to examples of women's independent cinema. Equally important is her argument that feminist film theory has focused on questions of sexuality and difference to the exclusion of questions of money, work, and politics, a focus which in some ways mimics dominant cinema's obsession.

Structurally, then, *A Fine Romance* follows what Mellencamp sees as her "five ages of feminism": a taxonomy which she describes as historical (from the early 1970s through the 1990s), personal (through the decades of her professional life), and descriptive ("the taxonomy derived from what I perceive to be tactics of feminist film critics") (9). Mellencamp's first three ages—"intellectual feminism," "irascible feminism," and "experimental feminism"—all emphasize sexual difference, but differ in tone and perspective. What she calls intellectual feminism—feminist appropriations of Lacanian psychoanalysis with their emphasis on the role of vision in inscribing sexual difference—is cool and dispassionate. Chapters in this section of the book trace the development of romance in, for the most part, Hollywood film, from the familialism of classical Hollywood cinema, its denial and containment of "dangerous eroticism by death or marriage" (20), to the narcissism, violence, and idealization of romance in films such as Quentin Tarantino's *True Romance, Reservoir Dogs,* and *Pulp Fiction,* and James Cameron's *True Lies.* Happily, though, Mellencamp finds things "looking up" for women in contemporary comedies such as *Punchline* and *This Is My Life,* which multiply points of view (between male and female or mother and daughter) and value friendship between adults or love between mother and daughter more than conventional heterosexual romance. Mellencamp concludes this section, however, with a reminder of how the dangers of romance become obsession, using as examples films as diverse as Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning,* Henry Jaglom's *Eating,* Aki Kaurismäki's *The Match Factory Girl,* and Chantal Akerman's *Night and Day.*

Age Two, irascible feminism, covers much of the same terrain as intellectual feminism but it is angry, both at men within the diegesis of the films in which it appears and at the exclusion of women in the "apparatus" theory of Metz, Baudry, and Comolli. Here Mellencamp analyzes several contemporary films (*The Quick and the Dead, Silence of the Lambs, Basic Instinct, Thelma and Louise*) in which "women enter a man's world, the arena of male subjectivity. They often move the narrative, take action, and possess 'the look'" (115). This section allows Mellencamp to illustrate one of her initial premises: that feminist film theory has, to some extent, influenced cultural production. Further, she uses *Silence of the Lambs* to illustrate the limits—as well as the applicability—of theories of vision for feminist film analysis.

But rage also "has its limits": for Mellencamp, "Ages One and Two remain within the terms of the theories they critique" (121), and so she moves on to a discussion of the work of women directors in Age Three, which she calls, after Meaghan Morris, experimental feminism. Here the focus shifts to women's perspectives and women's experiences, and increasingly it widens to address the concerns of older women, lesbians, and women of color. True to her central conceit, Mellencamp chooses to emphasize those works which revise famous romances (Sally Potter's *Thriller*) or fairy tales *(Something to Talk About, Angie),* or play with conventions of gothic romance (the films of Jane Campion). And in keeping with her critique of the focus of much feminist film theory, she praises these films for raising issues of race, class, aging, and sexual orientation—issues, she argues, which psychoanalytic criticism largely ignored.

But *A Fine Romance* is not an uncritical celebration of women's independent cinema: several films in this category are viewed as limited by Mellencamp when the focus is "still the body and sexual desire" (184). Thus, for example, Barbara Hammer's *Nitrate Kisses* is critiqued for recycling "that old saw that sex is liberating and the body the key to identity. Neither belief has taken us very far" (306, n32). Similarly, she describes Yvonne Rainer's *Privilege* as a film which in spite of addressing many pertinent issues for feminism in the 90s—race, lesbianism, aging—ultimately makes them subordinate to its central concern: the loss of male heterosexual desire. Rainer's film is also criticized (rather harshly, in my opinion) for its lack of intensity and affect, a criticism extended to film theory and avant-garde films of the 1970s in general in the next section, "Empirical Feminism."

Mellencamp concludes the section on experimental feminism with a restatement of one of her central points: "Feminist film theory has heavily invested

in the sexual economy at the expense of the money economy (and in bodies more than thoughts, in appearances more than actions). This divestiture sold off history and politics" (187). The chapters in the section entitled Empirical Feminism attempt to reverse this tendency through a focus on history: restoring working women such as sound editor Lela Simone and screenwriter/producer Elinor Glyn to Hollywood history; reading the "idle white woman" (and her relationship to consumerism and to race) of films such as De Mille's *The Cheat* through a series of popular movements influenced by Darwinism; and championing the experimental representation of history and memory in films by Julie Dash and Tracey Moffatt. Several themes emerge here: the neglect of affect in feminist film theory (Mellencamp defends an eclectic model drawing on Eisenstein and Deleuze to address that neglect); the importance of sound as well as vision; and the ways in which films by "transnational women of color" such as Dash and Moffatt and Laleen Jayamanne pose challenges and provide corrections to feminist film theory.

Age Five, economical feminism, returns to romance, but "What Cinderella and Snow White Forgot to Tell Thelma and Louise" (the title of an earlier, introductory chapter) becomes "What Virginia Woolf Did Tell Sally Potter." Here the fundamental issue is not sexual difference alone but "women's rights to knowledge, property, and work" (282), and Mellencamp's primary text is Potter's film version of Woolf's *Orlando,* which she reads as "an extension of Potter's previous concerns—the relation between the sexual economy and the money economy" (282). Potter and lead actor Tilda Swinton's (and Mellencamp's) presence at the first women's conference on film and television in Tblisi, Georgia, in 1988 provides a segue into a discussion of that conference (and the films of its organizer, Georgian director Lana Gogoberidze), and allows Mellencamp to conclude on a global and optimistic note.

It is difficult to do justice to the density and complexity of this book in a brief review of this nature, and in some ways the above description imposes a kind of linear logic on the text which belies the experience of actually reading it. Mellencamp moves from theoretical discussion to film analysis, from personal observation to autobiographical anecdote and back again, and I found myself responding in ways not unlike that ascribed above to feminists reading Hollywood films: at times energized and fascinated, at others frustrated and a bit confused. Mellencamp writes in a lively and engaging style which provides a welcome alternative to the impersonal and jargon-laden tone of much academic writing, and I found the book most useful for its insightful and provocative readings of contemporary cinema, prodding me to want to see and teach films I haven't yet experienced, encouraging me to give others I'd dismissed a second look. In this way Mellencamp makes a huge contribution by updating the important books of feminist film theory and criticism of the 1980s. On the other hand, such agile movement between levels of discourse doesn't always make connections between the theoretical premise and the filmic textual analysis or between topics convincing or readily apparent.

And what of Mellencamp's central organizing principle, her "five ages of film feminism?" She describes these initially as "idiosyncratic," "particular to my life and thought" (10), and as a record of her own intellectual history or perhaps even that of dominant tendencies in feminist film theory and criticism they are illuminating. But when they purport to do more, they are limited. For example, I found Mellencamp's suggestion that "Economics . . . is another story, one that is just beginning for feminism" (10), with a 1993 text described as "one of the initial forays" (293, nl3) simply untrue, and puzzling in light of her references elsewhere in the text to Charlotte Gilman Perkins' [sic—it should be Charlotte Perkins Gilman] 1898 *Women and Economics.* Reprinted in 1966, this was an early staple of second-wave feminism required reading. Equally puzzling to me is Mellencamp's decision to begin her film feminism taxonomy with the semiotic psychoanalytic "intellectual feminism," neglecting an older "image of women" or "sociological" criticism over which the former was usually hailed as an improvement, at least in the books of the 80s, including Mellencamp's own (co-edited with Mary Ann Doane and Linda Williams) *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism.* Here "image of women" criticism is reproached for "de-emphas[izing] difference," an understandable response, however, to the fact that "woman's sexual difference had so often in the past been used to oppress her." In *A Fine Romance,* on the other hand, Woolf and Monique Wittig are cited approvingly for "challeng[ing] sexual difference as a useful theoretical principle," and Mellencamp notes further that "Wittig's key point is that 'the doctrine of the difference between the sexes . . . justifies women's oppression' " (282). If Mellencamp is reassessing a judgement of earlier feminist film criticism here it would have been useful to say so.

Similarly, although Mellencamp quite rightfully admonishes male critics for appropriating feminist work without acknowledgement, she doesn't always acknowledge prior feminist work on similar films or topics. For example, we learn that "Perhaps the

biggest stretch was conscripting Marlene Dietrich into the middle-class family in *Blonde Venus*" (39), without reference to work on the film by E. Ann Kaplan or Lea Jacobs. The chapter headed "Sexual Economics: 'Gold Diggers of 1933'" fails to mention Paula Rabinowitz's earlier "Commodity Fetishism: Women in *Gold Diggers of 1933*," and the discussion of the changing construction of romance neglects Virginia Wright Wexman's *Creating the Couple*. In a sense, Mellencamp anticipates this criticism by admitting up front that "Even about film feminism, my thoughts are partial, in no sense imagined to cover this rich terrain. I no longer have the patience or stamina to finish every book" (10). But such omissions have the unfortunate effect of even further erasing feminist work and, as is especially clear in the example of the neglect of Rabinowitz's essay, give more substance to the claim that feminist film criticism has emphasized sexual difference to the exclusion of economics than that claim actually warrants.

In spite of these criticisms, however, I admire *A Fine Romance* for its incredible range and its bold, audacious analysis, but most of all because it serves as a forceful reminder of the *politics* of representation. Film matters to Mellencamp, and she makes us believe it matters in the lives of women. That's why many of us got into this business in the first place, and why we continue to work away. *A Fine Romance* gives us some encouragement.

DIANE WALDMAN

■ Diane Waldman teaches film studies and directs the Cultural and Critical Studies program at the University of Denver.

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## Full of Secrets

### Critical Approaches to "Twin Peaks"

Edited by David Lavery. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1995. $18.95.

*Full of Secrets* is filled to the brim with wonderful things, although the majority are not secrets. Trying to make sense of the good, the bad, and the disturbing elements of "Twin Peaks," the essays don't fall below a certain high level of scholarship and intensity. This, along with useful detailed appendices, make *Full of Secrets* a model handbook. Two things stand out. The first should strike aficionados of the series as obvious. Few television programs could spawn and sustain such a work. Second, the book demonstrates that quantitatively—by virtue of the sheer number of hours of programming created even for a fairly short-lived (two season) hour serial—television can provide an object of study that few media can match.

Regarding the first point, there's a danger in overestimating the uniqueness of the series, and in an effort to drive home a complex or scintillating academic point, it's tempting to overlook the fundamental things that made "Twin Peaks" such a captivating show. In no particular order, it had: sterling production values (including high-quality photography and a wonderful score); intelligent writing; good performances and handsome performers; an evocative setting; suspense; sex appeal; action; and engaging characters—all in a deliberately offbeat variation on a tried and true format: the murder mystery.

The essence of the series' appeal is discussed in a round-table discussion included in transcript form as the last piece in the collection proper. The participants try to come to terms with "Twin Peaks" as "postmodern." No matter how tendentious your definition of that term, it seems intuitively and on examination to apply to "Twin Peaks" like no other show. One essay contributor, J.P. Telotte, connects the two facets of "Twin Peaks" I've mentioned by arguing we shouldn't overlook how well the "expected" is rendered because it makes the subverting, ironic, referential qualities of the program so effective.

In her essay, "Infinite Games: The Derationalization of Detection in 'Twin Peaks,'" Angela Hague looks at Agent Dale Cooper's eccentric method of investigation and puts her finger on the issue of the series' postmodernity by discussing the sense of "infinite play" alive in the show. This notion is crucial to any use of the term postmodern. Put plainly, "Twin Peaks" was a lot of fun to watch, especially of course for those in the know–those who could reference what was referenced, or appreciate the degree to which David Lynch, Mark Frost and their various collaborators were irrepressible pranksters.

Although analysis and hide-and-seek are central components of many games and many played in "Twin Peaks," games are meant to be played and not simply analyzed or examined. This quality is apparent in the best essays in the book. They confront the series on its own level by playing games and celebrating games in a way that makes us want to play them, i.e., go back and watch the show. They read "Twin Peaks" with the almost same ludic intensity exhibited by its creators, which has the advantage of accounting for many different viewers' experience and not just that of the academic theoretician. And a

biggest stretch was conscripting Marlene Dietrich into the middle-class family in *Blonde Venus*" (39), without reference to work on the film by E. Ann Kaplan or Lea Jacobs. The chapter headed "Sexual Economics: 'Gold Diggers of 1933'" fails to mention Paula Rabinowitz's earlier "Commodity Fetishism: Women in *Gold Diggers of 1933*," and the discussion of the changing construction of romance neglects Virginia Wright Wexman's *Creating the Couple*. In a sense, Mellencamp anticipates this criticism by admitting up front that "Even about film feminism, my thoughts are partial, in no sense imagined to cover this rich terrain. I no longer have the patience or stamina to finish every book" (10). But such omissions have the unfortunate effect of even further erasing feminist work and, as is especially clear in the example of the neglect of Rabinowitz's essay, give more substance to the claim that feminist film criticism has emphasized sexual difference to the exclusion of economics than that claim actually warrants.

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recitation of the games played in the 30 episodes is not the same thing.

David Lavery sets the stage in his introduction by giving an orientation to the "Twin Peaks'" interpretive community and sampling some of the ways the program has been received. Jonathan Rosenbaum then offers a disparaging assessment of the series tied to a view of Lynch's social ideology. While he has a high opinion of Lynch as an artist, Rosenbaum views him as a "puritanical political naif" (22) with a regressive nostalgia for the worst of the Eisenhower era.

In a plain-spoken essay, Marc Dolan wants to understand the series' demise by offering an intricate analysis of the plot and its weaknesses vis-à-vis viewer expectations about various kinds of TV narrative. Henry Jenkins examines the usefulness of "computer net discourse" for analyzing the "popular reception of television texts" (53). He uses the show as a case study and claims Lynch monitored the nets and shaped the program in response.

Anyone who feels that TV and film sound tracks are rarely given their due will like Kathryn Kalinak's succinct essay about music. Diane Stevenson looks at incest in the middle-class home and makes the unassailable observation that family violence and sexual abuse are key to Lynch's work. Feminist perspectives are offered by Christy Desmet in her contribution, "The Canonization of Laura Palmer," and by Diana Hume George, who offers the least academic and most confessional reading of the show. Her "Lynching Women: A Feminist Reading of 'Twin Peaks'" gets to the heart of the show and includes one of the best lines in book: "Who but Lynch could give saddle shoes the impact of spiked heels?" (109).

George's passionate essay deals with the crucial issue raised by Lynch's oeuvre: the conflict between his obsession with objectifying the human body in perverse ways and the skill with which he does so. She acknowledges the beauty of the show–its pure aesthetic appeal (to whatever extent that exists)–and derides its implicit morality. "I still found 'Twin Peaks' powerful enough that my pleasure in viewing it transcended my objections to its sexual ethic, which I regard as reptilian" (119). Just as Rosenbaum sees a division between Lynch's artistry and manifest politics, George can condemn on moral grounds and revel in the form.

And finally, *Full of Secrets* is a treasure trove not least because of its five appendices: "Directors and Writers," "Cast List," "Abbreviations," "A 'Twin Peaks' Calendar," and "Twin Peaks' Scene Breakdown," which provide more information than you will ever need. This should be a source of comfort to both the fan and the theoretician in everyone.

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## Image and Mind

### Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science

By Gregory Currie. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. $59.95.

In *Image and Mind*, Gregory Currie provocatively reexamines some traditional problem areas of film theory. He engages questions about how cinematic images communicate meaning and are interpreted by viewers, whether such images operate like a language, and whether the impression of realism that can result from photographic images is an illusion. While his cognitively inflected account makes some use of empirical work on perception, these citations are rather limited. His orientation, and method, is a philosophical one aimed at a systematic explication of the premises on which a theory or argument rests and the components from which it has been constructed. Accordingly, rather than marshaling a large body of evidence to support his claims, Currie's design is to produce a generalizing and conceptual argument that "aims at conclusions of maximum generality." Readers looking for a detailed cognitive account of film viewing may thus be disappointed, but those who appreciate a philosophical interrogation of the medium of cinema and, in particular, of the way film theory has constructed the medium, should find Currie's account enjoyable and stimulating.

Traditionalists, be warned: Currie is no friend of psychoanalytic theory, nor of the popular view in academic film studies that the cinema dupes its viewers with transparent visions of a false plenitude, nor of the ingrained notion that film images operate like a language and may be analyzed accordingly. Currie explicitly rejects the application of psychoanalytic theory to cinema and, in particular, the notion that the cinema's mobilization of unconscious desires in viewers causes them to fundamentally misrecognize the nature of what they see on screen. Viewers are not subject to the imperious gaze of the camera, nor are

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they deluded by the medium into believing they are actually inside the narrative, watching as a witness physically present and instantiated by the camera's point of view. Currie critiques these accepted notions and offers alternative formulations of film viewing as a rational, rather than an irrational, enterprise. By reexamining the premises of much contemporary theory, Currie intends to help move it in a more productive direction.

Currie begins his reassessment by considering the nature of representation in cinema, and he sets out to disentangle it from the emphasis upon illusion and illusionism so characteristic of current theory. He achieves mixed results here. Currie questions the medium's ability to induce cognitive illusions, such as the alleged tendency for spectators to misrecognize the fictional world for a real one that they physically inhabit as observers. He suggests, instead, that the medium stimulates a perceptually based but impersonal form of imagining, during which viewers permit themselves to simulate the experience of alternate realities or states of consciousness, via the film imagery, but without being confused over the distinction between the two modalities. Currie's skepticism about the medium's ability to induce false beliefs in viewers is healthy and heuristic for the field.

Currie also rejects the notion that the cinema fosters a second kind of illusion—perceptual illusion. He presents a provocative argument that motion on screen is real, not illusory, and is really perceived. Screen movement is a "response-dependent concept," like the perception of color, authenticated and validated by uniform agreement among perceivers. This seems to me to be a distinction that does not carry much intellectual force or possess much theoretical utility. A rationalist account of film spectatorship loses nothing by granting that motion perception in cinema does not correspond with the measurable characteristics of projection. In fact, by building on the common biological characteristics of spectators, through the ability of the projector to stimulate retinal motion receptors, cinema acquires a powerful basis for its universal appeal and comprehensibility as well as for its ability to convey, via movement, three-dimensional information about the spatial world. Currie may be overly earnest about the need to disentangle our understanding of cinema from what he calls "the myth of illusion," but that is doubtless due to the proclivity of much contemporary theory for placing all of cinema's operations and effects under the rule of "illusion." However, an acknowledgment and acceptance of visual illusion in relation to cinema need not entail surrender to a view that such illusions create ideological or epistemological mystification. The viewer's perception of apparent motion on screen is a biologically conditioned response, and nothing ideological necessarily follows as a consequence of that.

Currie argues—correctly, I believe—that viewers understand the depictive content of cinematic images by using their visual capacities for object recognition. Employed routinely in the real world, these are reliably transferable to photographic images. Thus, seeing a horse on screen is a matter not of illusion, but of recognizing the familiar pictured object. Currie is right to stress this characteristic because film theory has grossly underestimated the power and appeal of cinema's recognition-based mode of visual communication. In this area Currie locates the medium's realist basis: it replicates on screen the same kind of spatial information about a three-dimensional world that a viewer encounters, and proficiently interprets, outside the theater.

The long-take/deep-focus style, he argues, is perceptually the most realistic, since it maximizes the viewer's ability to perceive the spatio-temporal relations between objects. Here, Currie's analysis becomes a bit stiff and prescriptive. One can maintain that cinema, indeed, has a basis in perceptual realism in its ability to reproduce, on screen, 3D spatial information. But it also transforms this information, and Currie might be more sensitive to these transformations. Lenses of differing focal lengths, for example, will distort the reliability of spatial cues. Throughout *Prince of the City*, Sidney Lumet used wide-angle lenses to establish the duplicity of the narrative's fictional world. For Lumet, the lenses rendered space such that things were never what, or where, they seemed to be. A more nuanced account of the medium's perceptually based realist components would situate these alongside the medium's transformational abilities. A comprehensive account of cinema should recognize both.

In subsequent chapters, Currie demonstrates why pictures do not have linguistic properties or operate like a language, and he develops a level-headed account of how film activates the viewer's imagination and of the degree to which one might reliably speak of a viewer's inhabiting a narrative or a screen world. Against theories of a viewer's positioning as an embodied observer inside the screen world, Currie suggests that viewers imagine the narrative events as occurring, but not in relation to themselves as observers situated within the action. By avoiding the mysticism of current theory, Currie's account carries considerable conviction. He points out, for example, that viewers refer the contents of a subjective shot to a character's experience and not their own. "In general, subjective shots function to help us imagine what a character's

experience is like, not to imagine ourselves being that character and having that experience."

Throughout, Currie avoids using a polemical or inflammatory style and conducts his disassembling of current theory with a calm and reasoned tone. His use of a cognitive perspective to guide his philosophical excursions demonstrates some of the new directions in which film theory and scholarship is now moving and where they coexist (uneasily) with more established paradigms in the field. But spirited debate is a healthy phenomenon, and Currie's book clearly signals the state of tension that now prevails between competing theoretical paradigms. While its chief appeal will be to those readers who are philosophically inclined, the rupture within existing theory that it announces is symptomatic of a field undergoing a systematic and far-reaching transformation.

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## International FilmArchive CD-ROM

FIAF, 1 rue defacqz, 1000 Brussels, Belgium (email: fiaf@mail.interpac.be). Annual subscription: $450.00.

Among the gadgets, games, reference tools, and assorted documents which have become available to cinephiliacs in various electronic formats, the *International FilmArchive CD-ROM* should be of particular interest to film scholars. It is published twice a year by FIAF (The International Federation of Film Archives/Federation Internationale des Archives du Film). Since it was first published three years ago, it has been continuously expanded and updated to become a very versatile research tool for film and television studies. It is organized in eight databases, each of which is searchable from various access points. The largest database is the International Index to Film/TV Periodicals, which indexes over 500,000 articles published in more than 200 international film and television periodicals. The other databases are: a Thesaurus of General Subjects (Film); a List of Periodicals Indexed 1972–1996; a List of FIAF Members; a Bibliography of FIAF Member's Publications (1966–1995), which includes publications by various film archives; an International Directory of Film and TV Documentation Collections; a section called Treasures from the Film Archives, which lists FIAF members' silent film holdings; and a bibliography of Latin-American cinema.

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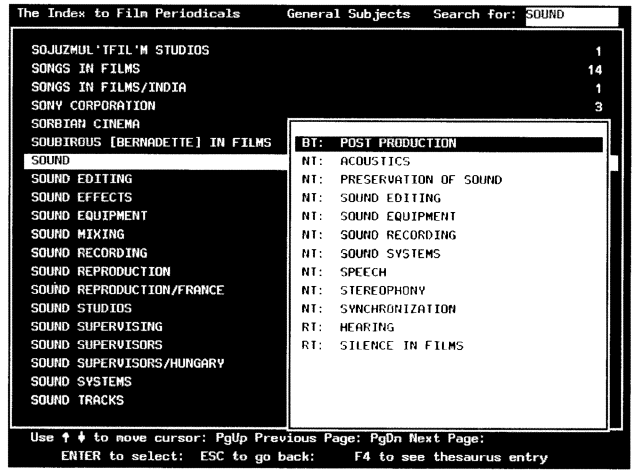


Search is of particular note, as it searches for any word in the citation's title, subject headings, and description of content. Search results can be displayed in a brief list or as full citations. The results of searches can be either printed or saved to a file, making the compilation of bibliographies almost effortless.

The database of Treasures from the Film Archives can be searched by film titles, by countries and date, by credits and by cast. While the information provided doesn't describe the condition of the films or claim to be exhaustive, it is nevertheless most valuable in that it is the first and only listing of international archival holdings and their locations. Also of great value for most scholars is the compilation of Film and TV Documentation Collections. Again, the list doesn't give specific information about the amount and types of documents, but it provides a general idea of what film and television manuscript and special collections are available, and is indexed by subject and personal name. It also includes hours, contact information, access policies, and general holdings information for each institution. As in the case of other databases, new information will be added semi-annually.

While new data is being entered, the system is also becoming easier to use. For example, in the near future, it will be available in a Windows version that

experience is like, not to imagine ourselves being that character and having that experience."

Throughout, Currie avoids using a polemical or inflammatory style and conducts his disassembling of current theory with a calm and reasoned tone. His use of a cognitive perspective to guide his philosophical excursions demonstrates some of the new directions in which film theory and scholarship is now moving and where they coexist (uneasily) with more established paradigms in the field. But spirited debate is a healthy phenomenon, and Currie's book clearly signals the state of tension that now prevails between competing theoretical paradigms. While its chief appeal will be to those readers who are philosophically inclined, the rupture within existing theory that it announces is symptomatic of a field undergoing a systematic and far-reaching transformation.

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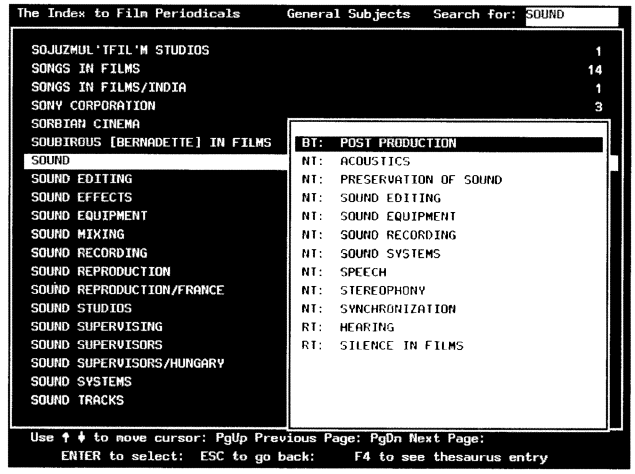


Search is of particular note, as it searches for any word in the citation's title, subject headings, and description of content. Search results can be displayed in a brief list or as full citations. The results of searches can be either printed or saved to a file, making the compilation of bibliographies almost effortless.

The database of Treasures from the Film Archives can be searched by film titles, by countries and date, by credits and by cast. While the information provided doesn't describe the condition of the films or claim to be exhaustive, it is nevertheless most valuable in that it is the first and only listing of international archival holdings and their locations. Also of great value for most scholars is the compilation of Film and TV Documentation Collections. Again, the list doesn't give specific information about the amount and types of documents, but it provides a general idea of what film and television manuscript and special collections are available, and is indexed by subject and personal name. It also includes hours, contact information, access policies, and general holdings information for each institution. As in the case of other databases, new information will be added semi-annually.

While new data is being entered, the system is also becoming easier to use. For example, in the near future, it will be available in a Windows version that

will make Boolean and other complex searching possible. Film students should be grateful to FIAF and to Michael Moulds, the main architect of this project, as well as to his collaborators, for undertaking such a massive project with limited resources. The *International FilmArchive CD-ROM* makes a large amount of information on films and film study resources quickly and easily accessible, and is highly recommended for all reference libraries.

BERTRAND AUGST

■ Bertrand Augst is Professor Emeritus of French and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley.

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## Israel before Israel

### Silent Cinema in the Holy Land

By Hillel Tryster. Jerusalem: Steven Spielberg Film Archive, 1995.

*Israel before Israel* surveys the history of silent cinema as it was developed by Zionists in Ottoman and British mandatory Palestine between 1895 and 1930. Hillel Tryster's absorbing study explores the political motivations and methods behind many of the productions, the early attempts to create an industry based on commercial rather than ideological interests, and looks at many of the main personalities involved. Though the book also provides a good survey of the work of the Lumière and Edison crews before and after the turn of the century, and the work of UFA and Fox later, it is the penetrating study of Zionist film-making that qives the book its edge.

To an outsider, early Palestinian film history sounds very dull stuff. Who, for example, except a really crazy film buff, would bother to explore Irish or Scottish or Greek films of the same period? Yet Tryster, Deputy Director of the Steven Spielberg Film Archive in Jerusalem, has written a book that is of broad fascination to anyone interested in film and political history. As he correctly remarks, most countries had a national cinema within a few years of the cinema's invention, and each of these cinemas reflected its national identity. The uniqueness of Zionist cinema was that it was actually intended to *shape* a national identity that did not exist. The idea of a Jew draining swamps, working the land, and building the roads of Palestine was a revolutionary concept, and film did much to spread that new image. So what Tryster is essentially writing about is the history of a propaganda and information movement.

To understand the book, one needs to understand a little of Zionist history. The modern Zionist movement, calling for a Jewish state and Jewish migration to Palestine, was founded in the mid-1890s. Palestine was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks till 1917, when the British conquered it and, followinq the Balfour declaration, gave tacit support to the creation of a Jewish homeland in the area, as long as the rights of the Arabs weren't prejudiced. Zionism, in essence, envisioned the return of a dispersed people to its ancient land, and the creation of a new society, and a new Jew. Altogether this was an absolutely revolutionary concept, and for more than 60 years film was to serve as one of its strongest idealistic and practical weapons.

Between 1917 and 1932, the key periods covered by Tryster, the films—95 percent of them silent shorts—told audiences throughout the world about the latest Jewish developments in Palestine. Often they asked their viewers to give money; sometimes the message was a simple "come join us."

The two main bodies supporting these films were the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Palestine Foundation Fund (PFF), both supported by the Zionist Organisation. The raison d'être of the JNF was to purchase land for the new Zionist enterprises, while the PFF had slightly wider objectives. What Tryster does is provide in great detail, and for the first time, a public understanding of the personalities, political considerations, and workings of both organisations as they relate to film. One is amazed, for instance, to see how the films were tracked, the audience analyzed, the contributions assessed, and the policies formulated. It is as if one had access to all the political thinking, financial reports, strategies and in-fighting behind the making and screening of *Potemkin* or *Triumph of the Will*.

One of the book's achievements is to give us excellent sketches of the pioneers of Israeli cinema, from producers such as Leo Herrmann, Murray Rosenberg, and Adolf Neufeld to the key early film-makers such as Natan Axelrod, Baruch Agadati, and Yaakov Ben Dov. The stories of Axelrod and Agadati and their pioneering work in the creation of the early newsreel are relatively well known, but it is to Tryster's credit that he resurrects Ben Dov from obscurity.

Ben Dov can be reckoned as the first serious Zionist cameraman to work in Israel. His filming of General Allenby entering Jerusalem in 1917 is well known, as is his filming of personalities such as Lord Samuels and Einstein. What is less well known, and revealed by Tryster, is that the funding bodies were worried by his amateurism and that he was sent at

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their expense to study the work of Pudovkin and Eisenstein, and film art in general.

Simplicity versus sophistication was not just Ben Dov's problem but a battle constantly debated in the Zionist film offices. A number of officials argued against the repetition of style and approach in the Zionist films and called for a more dramatic and story-oriented film. Vladmir Jabotinsky, the noted right-wing political leader, called Ben Dov's films uninterestinq and argued "they are all alike, and people will be bored to death being shown the town of Rehovot after they have already seen the town of Rishon."

Piquant stories like these light up the whole of Tryster's book, and wherever one turns there are new facts and revelations to amaze the reader. The few problems that exist are mostly minor. Subjects and personalities tend to repeat in different chapters, but this could be inevitable because all the subjects are so interrelated. More problematic is the fact that we are left slightly hanging because the book confines itself to the silent period. This seems an arbitrary choice, and is unfortunate because the book is really about propaganda and informational film-making, and to stay with the silents is to leave out all mention of *Sabra, Land of Promise, and This Is My Land,* the three greatest Zionist films of the 30s.

In his introduction Tryster claims that he approached this history with no particular axe to grind. As he says," Aware of the political sensitivity of much of the subject matter, I have tried to avoid any conclusions which could not be backed up by documentation." As a film-maker in Israel I understand only too well his dilemma. Nevertheless it might have been worthwhile to point out the almost total exclusion of Arabs from the Zionist films, except as objects of romance and exotica. It might also have been of interest for Tryster to include something of the film-makers' own descriptions of their tasks and difficulties. Thus I remember seeing a letter from Axelrod some years ago in which he stated that he was a Zionist and propagandist first and filmmaker second, and therefore deliberately avoided filming anything negative.

Many people, including Ella Shohat and Yaakov and Natan Gross, have written about Israeli cinema. The focus has usually been on features, especially from 1960 on. Few writers have looked thoroughly and deeply at the pre-1939 period, and Tryster is to be congratulated for doing this extremely well indeed. His book is a model of research and good writing, and deserves to become a classic in the field of scholarship and film propaganda.

ALAN ROSENTHAL

■ Alan Rosenthal is a writer and director living in Jerusalem. His documentary *We Could Have Danced All Niqht* (Israel TV 1994) deals with the history of Zionist film-making.

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## Picturing Japaneseness

### Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film

By Darrell William Davis. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. $49.50 cloth; $17.50 paper.

Between 1936 and 1941, Japan's military ambitions were reflected in many *jidaigeki* (historical drama) films consonant with the country's expansionist aims. Among them, however, were a number of films that rose above the level of mere propaganda: Teinosuke Kinugasa's *The Battle of Kawanakajima*, Hisatora Kumagai's *The Abe Clan*, and Mizoguchi's *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum* and *Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin*, among others.

Darrell Davis's *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film* is an ambitious attempt to place such films in their social and political context. In doing so, he explores the importance of these films in forging a national identity. According to him, their style is thought of as "monumental" since "they invest a form of spirituality in traditional Japanese heritage and embody a monument to a certain Japanese aura."

Davis does much to improve our understanding of *jidaigeki* films. He deftly uses historical, aesthetic, and filmic approaches to make his case. Davis's intensive analysis of *The Abe Clan* is an especially valuable contribution to the current scholarship on *jidaigeki* in the West, since this important film has remained unexplored in the English language.

In terms of its treatment of Japanese aesthetics in these films, this work ideally complements Noël

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Burch's *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (1979). Burch's strictly semiotic study primarily concerns particular patterns of signification, but often fails to discuss how the signifier can be related to the meaning of the film. Davis's study offers an insightful exploration of the process of signification—the unification of stylistic and thematic elements in the individual film.

Though the work is long overdue, and therefore valuable, there are still some unresolved problems. The first has to do with the scope of the author's research. Primary Japanese resources here are scarce. The author admits to having limited reading skill in Japanese, but could still have sought help in gaining access to certain major sources available in Japanese, such as Junichiro Tanaka's *Nihon Eiga Hattatsushi (The History of the Development of Japanese Cinema)* and Kikuo Yamamoto's exhaustive study, *Nihon Eiga ni Okeru Gaikoku Eiga no Eikyo (The Influence of Foreign Films on Japanese Cinema)*. Another problem is organizational. Part of the second chapter labors over a historical discourse on nationalism worldwide and its relationship with national cinema. The reader is apt to feel burdened with too much world history, and correspondingly impatient to get the matter at hand.

Chapter 7, which concerns *The Abe Clan*, is the best in this book. But the trouble is that chapter 8 then comes as a kind of anticlimax. The author's critical momentum slackens noticeably in his treatment of *The Gate of Hell*, for example. Here Davis needs to show how the prewar concept of monumentalism has undergone modification in *The Gate of Hell* in a clearer and more substantial manner. He is quite right in observing that in this Kinugasa film "militarism is neatly dropped and pictorialism is intensified." However, since *The Gate of Hell* is the first period film in Eastman color, more detailed discussion of the director's use of color as it relates to the enhancement of pictorial effects would have enriched the context of the analysis.

There is also some difficulty arising out of Davis's application of a Western critical method, specifically the theory on myth explored in Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. In chapter 4, Davis talks about the high and low mimetic modes—a focal point of Frye's pioneer work in Western modern literary criticism—as they relate to the representative works of monumental style. However, this theoretical thrust is not really tested in the chapters that are devoted to close analyses of individual films.

Finally, the manuscript contains a number of minor errors and questionable observations about Japanese language and culture in general. For example, the author claims that the 1960s are the "golden age" of national cinemas. This generalization does not apply to Japanese cinema, whose golden age is traditionally seen as the 1950s. Elsewhere, the author points out that the characters' non-movement in the climactic sequence of Inagaki's *Musashi* is reminiscent of the *mie* posture in Kabuki. The better analogy is to another Kabuki posture, *merihari*, the actor's sudden halt in movement, which signals action leading to decisive outcome. However, despite some problems, *Picturing Japaneseness* is a thought-provoking study designed for a broad audience ranging from film scholars to historians of Japanese culture.

KEIKO MCDONALD

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## Post-Theory

### Reconstructing Film Studies

**Edited by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. $17.95.**

David Bordwell and Noël Carroll's provocative and accomplished anthology has a dual purpose: to offer a critique of film studies' heavy reliance on, as they label it, "Grand Theory," that is, Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralist semiotics, poststructuralist literary theory, and Althusserian Marxism, and to present an agenda of "mid-level" research uncommitted to Grand Theory. This latter program grows from Bordwell and Carroll's expressed desire to see the field move in the direction of work unencumbered by Grand Theory; as they point out, "What is coming after Theory is not another Theory, but theories and the activity of theorizing" (xiv). Theorizing, from their perspective, builds from employing "the most stringent philosophical reasoning, historical arguments, and social, economic, and critical analyses we can find, in film studies, or elsewhere (even in science)" (xiv). Several of the essays gravitate toward the applicability of cognitivism as a method, or as the editors state, more precisely, as a stance to account for film reception.

With a collection of works organized loosely around cognitivism, Bordwell and Carroll continue their considerable and lengthy scholarship in this area. Bordwell, for example, advanced a model for narrative comprehension of film heavily indebted to

Burch's *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (1979). Burch's strictly semiotic study primarily concerns particular patterns of signification, but often fails to discuss how the signifier can be related to the meaning of the film. Davis's study offers an insightful exploration of the process of signification—the unification of stylistic and thematic elements in the individual film.

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cognitive psychology in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). The current anthology appears, most immediately, as a means to contextualize the cognitive approach and to place it within a wider framework to include historical and institutional research.

*Post-Theory* is divided into four parts: "State of the Art," "Film Theory and Aesthetics," "Psychology of Film," and "History and Analysis." No doubt the first part will create the greatest discussion among film scholars. Essentially a full-frontal assault on "Theory" (with a capital T), particularly psychoanalysis, "State of the Art" consists of two essays (both from the editors), Bordwell's "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory" and Carroll's "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment." After a useful historicization of film theory from 1975 through 1995, Bordwell locates "culturalism," comprised of Frankfurt School cultural criticism, postmodernism, and Cultural Studies, as the end result of 1990s Theory. As he states, "The word 'culture' has become to 1990s academe what Toyotas have become for the automobile market, but the term is unavoidable" (9). Locating several key continuities between psychoanalysis (specifically subject-position theory) and culturalism, Bordwell concludes by claiming that "middle-level research," such as empirical studies of film-makers, genres, and national cinemas, represents the future for the discipline: "To get specific: Middle-level research programs have shown that an argument can be at once conceptually powerful and based in evidence without appeal to theoretical bricolage or association of ideas" (29).

Carroll's chapter paints a more jaundiced picture of the field. With the theoretical excursions of the 1970s labelled as "dilettantish" and the application of the Theory as monolithic much of the time, Carroll claims that the Theory has been maintained, in part, through political correctness: "Anyone who opposes the Theory, for whatever reason, is politically suspect—probably a ruling class, neoconservative, homophobic misogynist" (45). The solution to this malaise is offered by Carroll, who amusingly tags himself as a "self-appointed reformer": theorizing and theory building as a model, dialectical thinking responding to data, and an appeal to cognitivism as a stance for film analysis. Somewhat defensively, Carroll expects that his proposal, "moderate" in scope, will be met with derision by those academics heavily invested in the Theory. He hopes that his "rational argumentation" will be of use to the uncommitted: "those in film studies and those (historians, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, and so on) in related disciplines that study film who are interested in evolving frameworks for comprehending cinema but who are doctrinally unaligned" (68).

The bulk of the anthology illustrates "middle-level research" in practice. "Film Theory and Aesthetics" contains articles critiquing Grand Theory and its application, as well as close analyses of films and specific techniques. "Psychology of Film" offers background on cognitivism, highlighting how prior work in cognitive psychology has a bearing on the cinema and spectatorship. "History and Analysis" includes economic, institutional, and historical work considering both domestic and international cinemas. The best of the pieces in each section functions as Bordwell's and Carroll's evaluations of the field—posing fundamental questions often left unstated within the discipline, refusing to iron out the complexity of issues, and provoking a whole set of research questions and agendas on their own terms. Among the articles critiquing the Theory, Stephen Prince's "Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Problem of the Missing Spectator" argues that psychoanalytic film theory has produced a model of spectatorship at odds with research in psychology and communication. Illustrating his argument clearly and forcefully with an analysis of the ways in which Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten" has been coopted by film studies, Prince concludes that "problems of sampling, of fabrication of data, and of the introduction of a response set in his subjects" (76) have been glossed over by film theorists applying Freud's work to the issue of spectatorship. The result is a chapter which, in a compelling and well-reasoned manner, calls into question film studies' appropriation of psychoanalysis.

In terms of historical and institutional work, both Tino Balio's "Columbia Pictures: The Making of a Motion Picture Major, 1930–1943" and Donald Crafton's "*The Jazz Singer*'s Reception in the Media and at the Box Office" stand out among the other contributors: both demonstrate the exploratory nature of writing film history, and both attempt to answer a specific historical and industrial question employing secondary data. While, as Balio states, primary studio records would allow for "a definitive account of Columbia's escape from Poverty Row," his astute readings of trade journals and business magazines from the era permit him to build a convincing case for the industrial development of the studio. In an account of the commercial reception of *The Jazz Singer* that reads like a suspenseful detective story, Crafton examines weekly box-office statistics by theater to help uncover that, contrary to popular belief, the film was not a Broadway smash in its initial engagements. Crafton admits that he does not want merely to sup-

ply an alternative explanation, for "legends are also historical documents" (476). Rather, he is interested by the ways through which "history" becomes narrativized—and therefore how the *Jazz Singer* legend became constructed as it did.

Although a section is devoted specifically to issues in perceptual and cognitive psychology that might have an impact on film theory, the most persuasive argument is offered by editor Bordwell in his own chapter, "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision." Bordwell considers the role played by perception in forming and understanding convention in filmic representations. He centers his paper around the shot/reverse-shot image and the reasons behind this particular cinematic convention. In an illuminating example of how cognitive matters have affected cinema, Bordwell draws upon this literature as a partial explanation for the propensity for shot/reverse-shots to be 3/4 views: "There is some experimental evidence that for human faces in pictures, the 3/4 view may be more easily recognized than other orientations" (98). Through addressing this specific example, Bordwell, in a concrete manner, shows how cognitive matters foster the development of norms within cinema.

Certainly there is an impressive range to the chapters, from film music (Jeff Smith, Jerrold Levinson) and feminist responses to horror (Cynthia A. Freeland) to Danish cinema (Mette Hjort) and a critique of Fredric Jameson's writings on film history (Michael Walsh). While the level of scholarship is high and ideas are worked through in a rigorous manner, the range does tend to undermine the overall coherency of the project at hand. Although Bordwell and Carroll stress that the anthology does not espouse the party line of cognition and that their desire is "to afford a space where disagreement can flourish" (346), much of the anthology is nevertheless devoted to the contributions of cognitive psychology to film studies. A clearer articulation of the relationship between articles and, more specifically, of the cognitively oriented articles to the historically oriented ones would have made an even more persuasive argument. On the other hand, the disjunctures also save the anthology from presenting a monolithic version of cognitivism as savior for the field. In addition, by stressing the differences among pieces, and even between the editors, Bordwell and Carroll rescue the anthology from being its own version of empire building. Rhetoric such as "piecemeal theorizing" and "middle-level research" also help Bordwell and Carroll's overall project from seeming too lofty.

In the best sense argumentative, *Post-Theory* offers a reasoned assessment of contemporary theory with some valid routes for productive scholarship. If my own reaction to the anthology is muted or tempered enthusiasm, I am concerned that Bordwell and particularly Carroll's denunciations be taken, as they suggest, in the spirit of dialectical thinking. Those pieces (such as Donald Crafton's) which openly acknowledge the contributions of past film theorists while still identifying certain problems in method and analysis, at least accommodate a great deal of significant scholarship. Finally, despite Carroll's concerns about political correctness, the notion of a marginalized perspective—whether racial, sexual, or political—has been one of the most vital areas of the field, with much work falling outside the domain of Grand Theory. To their credit, though, Bordwell and Carroll do not constrain others to their position. For instance, Cynthia Freeland's essay "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films" seeks to place her analysis in the context of recent work in queer and performance theory. While perhaps not a "reconstruction" of film studies as promised in the title (particularly given the editors' previous works on the values of cognitivism), *Post-Theory* still presents a fine variety of critical and historical essays which illuminate, challenge, and at times agitate their reader.

JUSTIN WYATT

■ Justin Wyatt is currently a visiting professor at the University of Arizona.

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## Replications

### A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film

**By J. P. Telotte. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995. $29.95 cloth; $13.95 paper.**

Recently, the various types of artificial beings within the genre of science fiction have been the subject of particular critical interest. In part the result of Donna Haraway's influential *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women,* published in 1991, there have been Per Schelde's *Androids, Humanoids, and Other Science Fiction Monsters* (1993), Scott Bukatman's *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (1993), and Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz's *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* (1995). Joining this list is the new book by prolific genre critic J. P. Telotte. Approaching the subject from a different

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perspective than any of these other books, Telotte gives as his reason for concentrating on this particular image within the genre (rather than, say, time travel, space travel, or aliens) that these artificial beings—"robots, androids, cyborgs, replicants and *Thing*-like imitators of humankind" (3)—constitute the single most important image in the genre because it so directly expresses "the interactions between the human and the technological that lie at the very heart of science fiction" (5).

Thus, Telotte argues, such representations are especially apposite for critical analysis, particularly now. In the contemporary age of corporate mass media, reproductive technology, genetic engineering, and virtual reality, such imagery speaks directly to "that sense of 'otherness' which underlies all our recent discussions about gender, race, and sexual orientation" (7). In our Baudrillardian age of simulations, the body as a constructed site captures the essential qualities of the "postmodern self." Today, like Robocop, even as we are aware that we are losing our traditional sense of what it is to be "human," we are also aware of the extent to which we are increasingly constructed, programmed, and animated. The image of the robot thus coalesces into a complex generic icon all the forces that currently challenge our traditional notions of human identity and the individual self.

The robotic image also tells us a good deal about the medium of cinema itself. Telotte sees such imagery as a mirror of both the human and the technological, an amalgam that not only is a double for the former, but also embodies the dialectic of anxiety and attraction toward the latter that animates the genre and the pleasure of cinema itself. He quotes Aristotle to the effect that "the instinct for imitation is inherent in man" (35), and points out that the human urge to fashion ideal replicants springs from the same promethean desire that motivates what André Bazin called "the myth of total cinema." New technological developments in film-making provide a more perfect imitation of reality than heretofore; this technology enhances the special effects that constitute a primary appeal of science-fiction film. However, since now, in the case of the cinematographic image, it is no longer true that seeing is believing, we cannot help but dread such images even as we are lured by them.

Our fascination with this "fantasy of robotism" results from the fact that it provides a space where we can experience otherness. Hence "robots are not simply something we make, but something we make out of ourselves, a fantasy wherein we accommodate ourselves" to a constantly changing and improving technology (49). In this sense, Telotte offers an interesting new twist on the argument that science fiction is an inherently "therapeutic" genre. Employing the ideas of Russian Formalism, such critics as Robert Scholes and Darko Suvin have argued for the genre's unique mobilization in the reader or viewer of a "cognitive estrangement" that, as a very result of the difference of its narrative premises, forces us to attend with renewed attention to the real world. So for Telotte, science fiction has the potential ability, in its extrapolated images of our growing "robotic" condition, to show us apocalyptic possibilities which can "save us from our own craftiness" (51) by providing us with a deeper understanding of the self.

Before proceeding to a series of close readings of specific films, Telotte offers a brief overview of the history of the robotic image in science-fiction literature and cinema. His examples are wide-ranging, from Mary Shelley and Poe to Stanislaw Lem and William Gibson, from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* to Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Terminator* films. He discusses suspects both usual (Robby the Robot) and unusual (the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*), and he devotes subsequent chapters not only to canonical works but also to neglected ones such as the pair of robotic theme-park movies *Westworld* (1973) and *Futureworld* (1976), which now seem more presciently postmodern than before. Telotte also gives serious attention to the fantastic B serials of the 1930s and 40s such as *Flash Gordon* and *Phantom Empire,* finding in their very structure of serialization the creeping effects of roboticism. Unfortunately, however, television science fiction is only briefly acknowledged, despite such clearly important characters as the android Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation.* Also, Telotte might have considered such relevant comedic imagery as Woody Allen's masquerade as a robotic servant in *Sleeper* (1973), the famous image in *Modern Times* (1936) of Chaplin's tramp caught in the gears of the conveyor belt after struggling to maintain the inhuman robotic pace of the assembly line, and Mack Sennett's slapstick movies which, as Gerald Mast has pointed out, transform people into mechanized toys—machines—the perfect embodiment of Henri Bergson's notion of humor's dependency on dehumanization for its effect.

While Telotte's readings are generally sensitive and convincing, they nevertheless suffer from two obvious problems. The first is Telotte's failure to contextualize his analysis within the larger institutional economy of the genre system. His idea of science fiction's "double focus," its surrender to the allure of technology even as it provides a warning about it, is true enough and particularly well demonstrated in the discussion of individual films like *Metropolis* where, among other things, it is fore-

grounded in the film's emphasis upon the robot Maria's power (after Baudrillard) of seduction. But surely this ambivalence is typical of the "magical thinking" that structures most genre films. In this context, science fiction's double focus is hardly unique; instead it is analogous to, say, horror's indulgence in the return of the repressed even as it generally seeks to replace the lid on the id, the musical's indulgence in the individuality of performance even as it champions community values, and the gangster film's celebration of personal desires even as it ultimately endorses social responsibility.

The concept of the "self" to which Telotte insistently refers seems, particularly within the context of science fiction, itself a rather utopian fantasy. Telotte tends to generalize about this core of human being, with the result that the differences of gender, race, and sexual orientation which he claims robot imagery throws into relief, recede in favor of a universalized notion of the self and the human. Telotte's conception of the self ultimately exists beyond both ideology and history, like the "natural man" of post-Enlightenment social philosophers. Hence, for all the fine nuances of Telotte's reading of *Metropolis,* there is little consideration of the film or its robotic imagery as expressing any issues rooted in the social upheaval of 1920s Germany. It may be that Telotte deliberately seeks to avoid any such specificity in order to resist what he describes as Western culture's mastery and control of the body for the purpose of turning "the self into a knowable creature, a being of parts that could be dissected, examined, and understood through the perspective modern science offered" (74), but even such mystic bards as Walt Whitman manage to define the contours of the liberated soul more precisely than Telotte does here.

Telotte's humanist perspective is refreshing but it also suffers from this lack, especially since his argument relies upon the ideas of such contemporary thinkers as Foucault, Haraway, and Baudrillard, critics whose work challenges such traditional assumptions. Because one can only applaud any critical effort that seeks the kind of engagement required to grapple with the fundamental question of "what does it mean to be human in the modern world" (20), as well as one which is notably more optimistic than most contemporary cultural theory, this weakness in conception is all the more regrettable. Nevertheless, Telotte does offer a convincing argument for the evolving nature of the robotic image in science-fiction film as it moves from "a mere figure of fantasy or a metaphor for science's efforts to inscribe its power on the human" to represent "an anxiety about reality itself" (18). If, in the end, the book "stops short—as history, as explication of the genre, and as cultural commentary" (194), Telotte still provides us with convincing evidence that science fiction may indeed be the most appropriate genre for addressing the postmodern condition.

BARRY KEITH GRANT

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## Sin and Censorship

### The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry

By Frank Walsh. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996. $35.00.

## Children and the Movies

### Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy

Edited by Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. $59.95.

It is likely that the last time it was possible to hold motion picture entertainment to a standard of morality independent of public taste came during the Great Depression, when a handful of studios controlled the technology of film-making. Then an economic crisis and the threat of government regulation forced financially strapped studios to bow to the wishes of censors and such press groups as the Roman Catholic Legion of Decency.

By 1953 things had changed, and how and why things changed is ably explained by Frank Walsh in *Sin and Censorship,* an informative new book on the Catholic Church's efforts to influence cinema. In 1953 Otto Preminger produced and directed for United Artists *The Moon Is Blue*, a comedy about a middle-aged man who tries to seduce a virgin. Production Code Administration (P.C.A.) chief Joseph Breen thought the film treated seduction frivolously, and he objected when the man said to the woman, "You are shallow, cynical, selfish, immoral, and I like you" (258). When Breen refused to approve the picture (under the Production Code an immoral person could not also be likable), the studio released the film anyway. The Legion of Decency, which acted independently from the P.C.A., and which for nearly two

grounded in the film's emphasis upon the robot Maria's power (after Baudrillard) of seduction. But surely this ambivalence is typical of the "magical thinking" that structures most genre films. In this context, science fiction's double focus is hardly unique; instead it is analogous to, say, horror's indulgence in the return of the repressed even as it generally seeks to replace the lid on the id, the musical's indulgence in the individuality of performance even as it champions community values, and the gangster film's celebration of personal desires even as it ultimately endorses social responsibility.

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decades had been able to bring studios to their knees with the threat of a boycott, was divided over this picture. Its leaders condemned the movie, while the Legion's board of reviewers favored a more lenient treatment.

According to Walsh, *The Moon Is Blue* was "a major turning point" (260) in movie censorship. Preminger's picture proved financially successful, and the controversy surrounding it dealt a "severe blow" (260) to Breen and the P.C.A. Breen died in 1954, and, a little more than a decade later, so did both the Code and the P.C.A., replaced by a new rating system that gave public taste, not Judeo-Christian morality, the final say in determining content.

The controversy over *The Moon Is Blue* revealed the waning power of the Legion as well as the changing character of Roman Catholicism in the United States. The Legion's condemnation, which once might have meant financial disaster to the offending studio, now served mainly to arouse public interest, and "clearly boosted ticket sales" (260) for *The Moon Is Blue*. "Where once the Legion's major challenge was to hold the line in Hollywood," Walsh writes, "its supporters began to wonder if it could even hold the line within the church" (282). As the Legion's power continued to decline, its pronouncements reminded the censor Jack Vizzard of "the sound of hammers on casket nails" (315). In 1965, the Legion changed its name to the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures (N.C.O.M.P.), which continued to exist until 1980. But its power was gone, and by the early 1970s, a condemned rating from N.C.O.M.P. "caused hardly a ripple in the industry" (328).

*Sin and Censorship* comes on the heels of other fine studies in this area by Leonard Leff and Jerold Simmons, Gregory Black, and James Skinner. These studies have been made possible by the opening in recent years of several movie industry- and church-related archives. While Walsh examines some of the same territory as these authors, he covers new territory as well. Walsh uses a wider range of archival materials (e.g., studio, archdiocese, and other church-related records) and discusses more films than Leff and Simmons' *Dame in the Kimono*, which is based heavily on P.C.A. files and interviews. Where Black's *Hollywood Censored* focuses essentially on one decade, the 1930s, Walsh begins early in the century, and his epilogue attempts to bring the story into the 1990s. Walsh adds considerably to what we know about Catholic efforts to influence cinema before the Production Code and the Legion. The Church's concern about movies was long-standing and, before World War I, largely dominated by local bishops. After the Great War, Catholics moved toward greater centralization, which ultimately led to the creation of the Legion of Decency in 1934. Whereas Black questions the success of Legion boycotts, especially in their first year, Walsh is more inclined to see them as effective (116). Like Skinner in *The Cross and the Cinema*, Walsh provides considerable insight on why the Legion declined during the 1950s and 1960s. Walsh argues that the Legion's influence weakened in part because Catholics themselves changed; better-educated parishioners became more tolerant of movie content. Walsh's work is marred only by an incomplete and occasionally inaccurate index.

A major concern not only to Catholics but also to virtually all critics of cinema, past and present, has been the possible harmful effects of movies on the young. The protection of children has been one of the strongest threads connecting the early and the more recent efforts to regulate movies—and popular culture in general. During the 1920s, social scientists began to study motion pictures and their influence on young children. The most extensive examination ever made of this subject appeared between 1933 and 1935 in a series of 12 titles known as the Payne Fund Studies (P.F.S).

These "often cited, but seldom read" (17) volumes contain a good deal of insight and common sense. But for several reasons they never received the respect they deserved either from the public or from academician. The driving force in the creation of the P.F.S. was the Congregationalist minister William Harrison Short, who clearly was seeking evidence that would damage the movie industry (34). The Studies never escaped the suspicion that they had been completed simply to further Short's agenda. Such intellectuals as Mortimer Adler attacked the P.F.S.'s methods and conclusions. Moreover, the P.F.S. authors themselves were divided over the meaning of their data, and some turned toward other lines of research. Not insignificantly, the film industry—itself undergoing self-reform with the creation of the P.C.A. (strengthened by the Legion)—launched a campaign to discredit the P.F.S. (dubbed the "payneful studies" by Will Hays). If anything, the editors of *Children and the Movies* might have emphasized more the significance of Hays' efforts to undermine the P.F.S. His office by this time was nothing if not a giant public-relations machine that had become adept at blunting criticisms of Hollywood.

The reputation of the P.F.S. was helped by Henry James Forman's *Our Movie-Made Children* (1933), which popularized but oversimplified the Studies. The editors of *Children and the Movies* have made an important contribution to our understanding of the Payne Fund Studies by reminding us that the P.F.S. did not simply indict the movies, but rather offered a complex account of cinema's place in society. Drawing on

the Motion Picture Research Council records in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, and the Payne Fund, Inc. files in the Frances Payne Bolton Papers at Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, the creators of this volume have attempted to restore the Studies "to a place of honor in the history of communication research" (1). While acknowledging that the methodology of the P.F.S. was sometimes flawed, the Studies nevertheless "reached cautious conclusions that emphasized limited, indirect models of media influence and the extent to which individual social and environmental differences moderated film's impact on the young" (58). Taken together, these volumes represented examples of "excellent early mass communication research" (5).

This book is divided into two parts. The first, consisting of three chapters, provides a good account of how the individual studies evolved and how they were received after publication. Part 2 is devoted to unpublished Payne Fund material by Paul G. Cressey and Herbert Blumer.

In many respects, the unpublished manuscripts by Cressey, the "unsung hero of the Payne Fund project" (125), in chapters 4 and 5 are among the most interesting sections of this book. Cressey's work was to have been published under the title "Boys, Movies and City Streets," but because of a series of personal misfortunes, lack of funding, and the controversial nature of his research, it was never completed. Using a variety of research techniques, Cressey shifted his investigation from gauging the influence movies had on boys to trying to place motion pictures into a "wider social context where they [were] merely one link in the complex chain of social causation" (217). He discovered that ads stimulated a "sexual interpretation" of movies and a "morbid interest in murder and crime" (165); that the brightest boys attended films most often; and that in the midst of urban poverty and gang-ridden streets, movies often became a "substitute for wholesome play" (138). Cinema speeded up communication, and Cressey considered the movie theater a "second school house" (233), one that succeeded where formal education failed. He tried to apply psychology to understanding how children received information from films.

The Payne Fund focused its attention primarily on the movies but it did not ignore radio. It sought to promote educational broadcasting from the beginning, as Robert McChesney points out in an informative essay that forms an appendix to this volume. McChesney's essay reminds us that many of the great issues and debates sparked by the coming of motion pictures are not confined to movie theaters.

Today, sex and violence in the movies remains a hotly contested issue, but the battle for control of popular culture has expanded to other media, including television, the music industry, and the Internet. Both *Children and the Movies* and *Sin and Censorship* speak directly to these ongoing and crucial struggles by providing invaluable historical context.

STEPHEN VAUGHN

■ Stephen Vaughn teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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## Too Much of a Good Thing

### Mae West as Cultural Icon

By Ramona Curry. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

In recent years, star studies have proved an especially fruitful area of investigation for film theorists interested in questions of spectatorship and ideology. Star studies, deeply influenced by British Cultural Studies, have analysed stars to their cinematic and extracinematic meanings in relation to dominant ideology, viewing the star as a figure who simultaneously reflects dominant ideology and exposes contradictions in that ideology. Star studies have typically emphasized the ways in which members of different classes, genders, races, ethnicities, and sexualities appropriate or read star images. Despite this burgeoning interest in star studies, most academic investigations of individual stars are article-length only, and the few book-length studies on stars, such as Richard Dyer's groundbreaking *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979) or Jackie Stacey's important *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994) have dealt with the phenomenon of stars by examining multiple stars, none in depth. Book-length star studies are thus typically seen as the province of "popular" biographies and filmographies. Until recently, most academic books on individual stars have dealt with stars who are also directors, such as Keaton or Chaplin. As an in-depth analysis of Mae West as an iconic star whose career and legend are so crucial to an understanding of sex and gender politics in twentieth-century America, Ramona Curry's *Too Much of a Good Thing: Mae West as Cultural Icon* is a welcome addition to the field.

the Motion Picture Research Council records in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, and the Payne Fund, Inc. files in the Frances Payne Bolton Papers at Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, the creators of this volume have attempted to restore the Studies "to a place of honor in the history of communication research" (1). While acknowledging that the methodology of the P.F.S. was sometimes flawed, the Studies nevertheless "reached cautious conclusions that emphasized limited, indirect models of media influence and the extent to which individual social and environmental differences moderated film's impact on the young" (58). Taken together, these volumes represented examples of "excellent early mass communication research" (5).

This book is divided into two parts. The first, consisting of three chapters, provides a good account of how the individual studies evolved and how they were received after publication. Part 2 is devoted to unpublished Payne Fund material by Paul G. Cressey and Herbert Blumer.

In many respects, the unpublished manuscripts by Cressey, the "unsung hero of the Payne Fund project" (125), in chapters 4 and 5 are among the most interesting sections of this book. Cressey's work was to have been published under the title "Boys, Movies and City Streets," but because of a series of personal misfortunes, lack of funding, and the controversial nature of his research, it was never completed. Using a variety of research techniques, Cressey shifted his investigation from gauging the influence movies had on boys to trying to place motion pictures into a "wider social context where they [were] merely one link in the complex chain of social causation" (217). He discovered that ads stimulated a "sexual interpretation" of movies and a "morbid interest in murder and crime" (165); that the brightest boys attended films most often; and that in the midst of urban poverty and gang-ridden streets, movies often became a "substitute for wholesome play" (138). Cinema speeded up communication, and Cressey considered the movie theater a "second school house" (233), one that succeeded where formal education failed. He tried to apply psychology to understanding how children received information from films.

The Payne Fund focused its attention primarily on the movies but it did not ignore radio. It sought to promote educational broadcasting from the beginning, as Robert McChesney points out in an informative essay that forms an appendix to this volume. McChesney's essay reminds us that many of the great issues and debates sparked by the coming of motion pictures are not confined to movie theaters.

Today, sex and violence in the movies remains a hotly contested issue, but the battle for control of popular culture has expanded to other media, including television, the music industry, and the Internet. Both *Children and the Movies* and *Sin and Censorship* speak directly to these ongoing and crucial struggles by providing invaluable historical context.

STEPHEN VAUGHN

■ Stephen Vaughn teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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## Too Much of a Good Thing

### Mae West as Cultural Icon

By Ramona Curry. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. $49.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

In recent years, star studies have proved an especially fruitful area of investigation for film theorists interested in questions of spectatorship and ideology. Star studies, deeply influenced by British Cultural Studies, have analysed stars to their cinematic and extracinematic meanings in relation to dominant ideology, viewing the star as a figure who simultaneously reflects dominant ideology and exposes contradictions in that ideology. Star studies have typically emphasized the ways in which members of different classes, genders, races, ethnicities, and sexualities appropriate or read star images. Despite this burgeoning interest in star studies, most academic investigations of individual stars are article-length only, and the few book-length studies on stars, such as Richard Dyer's groundbreaking *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979) or Jackie Stacey's important *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994) have dealt with the phenomenon of stars by examining multiple stars, none in depth. Book-length star studies are thus typically seen as the province of "popular" biographies and filmographies. Until recently, most academic books on individual stars have dealt with stars who are also directors, such as Keaton or Chaplin. As an in-depth analysis of Mae West as an iconic star whose career and legend are so crucial to an understanding of sex and gender politics in twentieth-century America, Ramona Curry's *Too Much of a Good Thing: Mae West as Cultural Icon* is a welcome addition to the field.

*Too Much of a Good Thing* takes as its starting point the curious fact that "even though most contemporary media consumers have seen, at best, only brief clips from West's twelve films" (xiii), most consumers still recognise West as a movie icon, know at least a few of her one-liners, and can enjoy jokes about and imitations of West. Rather than being simple nostalgia, contemporary interest in West has to do with her relevance as a self-consciously camp figure, a precursor to Madonna and Roseanne as well as numerous drag queens. Exploring this sustained interest in "Mae West" as cultural icon, Curry examines the changing meaning of that icon: "How 'Mae West' has functioned for much of the twentieth century as a sign, what the sign has signified in the past, and how and what it represents currently" (xxii). Parallel to other cultural studies-inflected work on stars, Curry pays close attention to West's reception among gay and feminist fans to examine how they "produce alternative cultural representations that foster their interests out of the materials of dominant popular culture" (150). Alongside fan discourse, however, Curry forcefully emphasises the institutional factors that constructed the icon "Mae West."

In addition to West's own recorded performances on film, radio, and television, Curry analyses promotional materials, critical texts, censorship documents, and other public materials, such as jokes, parodies, and postcards, that contribute to the meaning of "Mae West." Rather than a history of West's career, or a biography of the star, Curry's book provides a detailed historical analysis of various, sometimes competing, public discourses about West and how those discourses changed over time. Along the way, Curry provides some fascinating close readings of various "Mae West" texts—including such gems as West's scandalous burlesque of Eve on the "Chase and Sanborn" radio program, her guest appearance on the "Mr. Ed" television show, and even the 1982 made-for-TV biopic of West starring Ann Jillian.

The first chapter provides an overview of West's complex star image and the way in which her image came to be an icon of social and sexual transgression. Curry highlights facets of West's image that are important to her image in all historical periods. These include her performance style and star-centered narratives; the degree of spectacle in her films and especially her costumes; her affiliations with African-American and other nondominant racial and ethnic groups as well as with gay male subcultures; and her status as an economically and socially powerful woman and author.

Following this overview, the book's structure is loosely chronological. Chapters 2 and 3 cover West's initial film career, her emblematic role in the 1930s debate about movie morality, and her late 1930s downfall, when West was famously named "box-office poison." Chapter 4 analyses West's comedic style, moving from a discussion of West's radio and TV appearances in the 1950s back to her 1930s film roles and forward to her 1964 appearance on "Mr. Ed." Chapter 5 deals with West's 1970s reception among gay men and feminists and her roles in the movies *Myra Breckinridge* and *Sextette*. And the final chapter places a number of contemporary jokes and parodies in constellation to examine West's meaning today.

The book's structure is, perhaps, a little misleading. First, the chronological approach makes the book seem more like a history of West's career than it is: in Curry's discussion, West's early 1920s theatrical career, her theatrical "comeback" in the 1940s, her recording career, and her 1950s Vegas act are largely neglected. Since Curry's interest is primarily in West as a film icon, these gaps are understandable, but do need to be addressed as gaps, especially since they contribute as much to West's transgressive image as her appearances on radio and TV do. Second, and more importantly, the structure somewhat obscures Curry's overall argument. Reading the last two chapters, about gay and feminist receptions of West, it becomes clear that Curry's project as a whole is responding to the largely negative 1970s feminist reception and that Curry wants to claim West—and by extension, camp—for feminist as well as gay male audiences. This marks an important effort to shape West's image, and not just historicize it; and the book would have been strengthened by more clearly foregrounding this agenda from the start.

In the book's most controversial argument, Curry aims not only to retrieve West from her negative reception among feminist critics in the 1970s (a project she shares with other contemporary feminist critics, as she notes) but also seeks to retrieve the Mae West of the 1970s—in other words, to recuperate the West of *Myra Breckinridge* and *Sextette* for feminist as well as gay readings. In opposition to those who still view West's 1970s performances as misogynist and self-denigrating, Curry not only points out the ageism of these responses (which find the spectacle of an 86-year-old sexpot laughable) but claims that these late performances are self-parodic but not self-denigrating female/female impersonation.

In her investigation of West's image, Curry combines a rich variety of methodologies—industrial and social histories, genre studies, close textual readings, cultural studies, and feminist-inflected psychoanalytic criticism. The psychoanalytic criticism sometimes seems unnecessary and distracting—as when, for

example, Curry discusses West's comedy using Freud's theory of jokes, having already provided ample textual and historical evidence for her argument that West's 1930s comedic style can be taken as aggressive social satire. Most often, however, these methodologies intersect in productive ways to provide a quasi-Foucauldian analysis of social history and public discourses around sexuality as well as a deep understanding of West's image.

In her discussion of censorship, for example, Curry discusses West's emblematic status in American debates about movie morality. Detailing negotiations between Paramount studio producers, MPPDA representatives, and state censorship boards over West's first starring feature, *She Done Him Wrong* (1933), Curry suggests that, contrary to popular opinion, West's first film had an "initially mild effect on Motion Picture Production Code enforcement" (29) and that it was "West's evident pleasure and success in openly exploiting her own sexuality as . . . both character and star" (53) that made her a target in reform discourse. Against those who claim that West's popularity declined when she had to clean up her image for the censors, Curry views West's downfall as a kind of sacrifice of West by the studio, which no longer found her scandalous image profitable.

As an in-depth star study—of a star whose films you may never have seen—*Too Much of a Good Thing: Mae West as Cultural Icon* may seem at first glance to be "too much." But it is well worth reading, not only as an analysis of West's image but also as a reflection of changing public discourses on sexuality and gender.

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# Book Notes

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BFI Classics. Cowie, Peter. *Annie Hall.* Evans, Peter William. *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown.* French, Sean. *The Terminator.* Hill, Lee. *Easy Rider.* Sanderson, Mark. *Don't Look Now.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1996. Where the selections of earlier volumes were described in terms of "360 key films in the history of the cinema," the present series shifts its institutional burden to writers' explorations of "their chosen films in the context of an argument about the film's quality and importance." With its many quotations, Peter Cowie's text evokes Annie Hall for those who have seen it, while the book's frame enlargements underline several of Woody Allen's narrative audacities. Cowie includes a section devoted to Allen's visual invention, one on cultural stereotypes, and a Glossary of Cultural References which defines names and titles that may puzzle an audience younger than the 1977 *Annie Hall.* For the record, Allen doesn't play the saxophone (11), Henry Youngman was Henny Youngman (15), and Billie Holiday sang few blues and rarely with swing bands (55).

Blending pop and sex, *Women on the Verge* impresses Peter Evans by its postmodern variations on themes from Hitchcock, Sirk, and Saura (perhaps also from Godard—*Le petit soldat*?). The film followed on Franco's death and suggests a national sigh of relief at shedding decades of censorship and cultural repression, a comic overlay with sociopolitical underpinnings.

Sean French's celebration of visual exposition in *The Terminator* recalls Manny Farber's old enthusiasms, although whether Farber might have been confounded by so many dead bodies remains problematic. The film's humor revolves around clever employments of Arnold Schwarzenegger's mannerisms in his seminal role. French's comparison of Schwarzenegger to Ronald Reagan is equally apt and funny.

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Dmytryk, Edward. *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. $34.95 cloth; $14.95 paper. This account, by a member of the Hollywood Ten, of the HUAC Hollywood witch-hunt, highlights the tension between scholarship and memoir. We know, from the work of Barbara Foley and others, that neither Stalin's regime nor the American Communist Party exercised control over Communist writers in the United States. But Edward Dmytryk, the director of such films as *Crossfire*, *Murder My Sweet*, and *The Caine Mutiny*, insists that Albert Maltz, Dalton Trumbo, Herbert Biberman, and other screenwriters who had been members of the party refused to write a word without clearance from the top. On the one hand, Dmytryk should know; he was a member of the party during the 1940s, for which he wound up serving six months in prison. On the other hand, Dmytryk was a member—and a desultory one at that—for only a year, and he remains unable to consider American Communists as anything but robots. Probably because of his only fleeting association with Communism, Dmytryk seems ill-informed about party policy in general, and typically damns those writers and directors who remained loyal to the party as being the tools of overzealous wives who were the "the driving force[s] in party loyalty" (184). Perhaps most unfortunate, Dmytryk seems simply incredulous that his act of contrition—naming names in 1951 in order to clear his own—inspired lasting enmity among his blacklisted colleagues. In spite of these problems, or perhaps because of them, this is an interesting memoir, and Dmytryk deserves both the respect and the doubt due an eyewitness.

ERIC SMOODIN

Sherman, Vincent. *Studio Affairs: My Life as a Film Director*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996. $24.95. Few Hollywood directors from the 1930s and 40s can match the candor of veteran Vincent Sherman. Although the double-entendre title of his autobiography refers to life both on and off the soundstage—chronicling affairs with luminaries Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Rita Hayworth—the most fascinating aspects of Sherman's Hollywood career were precisely those points of crossfertilization, life feeding into art, and the dramatic refinements he sought to intensify the quality of his screen work. Sherman's films find an honesty that—like his autobiography—fall well outside the range of Hollywood braggadocio. His eloquent defense of the talent of other directors of the time—often dismissed, he notes, as mere workhorses for the studios—is a weightier argument for the craftsmanship that went into the film productions of his era. Sherman's travails in 1920s New York read almost like Balzac as the struggling actor lifts himself up the social ladder, learning every bit of his craft along the way, with revealing anecdotes of John Barrymore, Sinclair Lewis, Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, and many others as he eventually climbs into director's shoes at Warners. Although gray-listed in right-wing Hollywood in the 1950s, time vindicated him, allowing him to direct inside the shifting economics of the film world as the big studios declined and merged.

THOMAS SANFILIP

Mannoni, Laurent, Donata Pesenti Campagnoni, and David Robinson, eds. *Light and Movement: Incunabula of the Motion Picture, 1420–1896*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press/BFI, 1996. $95.00. It is safe to say that you have never seen a film book quite like *Light and Movement*. Designed as a source book on the scientific and technical origins of the cinema, it brings together more than 40 crucial documents spread over almost 500 years and across five languages—including 16th-century ecclesiastical Latin, cinquecento Italian, 17th-century English, and 19th-century German—combined with modern commentary by the three editors in English, Italian, and French. What adds to the special flavor is that practically all these documents are reproduced in color facsimiles of the originals. The book is a great treasure chest of optical toys and inventions—the scenic effects that provide this vast scientific adventure its spectacle.

The editors reprint major inventions and classic texts cheek by jowl with lesser-known arcane counterparts. Among the classic texts, long out of print and out of anthologies, the most important is the magic lantern portion of Kircher's *Ars magna lucis*, the sem-

inal illustrated book on optics and the camera obscura published in 1671. The anthology ranges widely, including everything from Robertson's landmark patent for his Fantascope to the famous 1891 article in *Revue générale des sciences* in which Marey summarizes his research with the "fusil photographique" and the chronophotographs. Marey, the zoetrope, Reynaud's praxinoscope, Daguerre's dioramas, the Muybridge photographs, and pre-French Revolution phantasmagorias are all well represented. But so are forgotten predecessors and contemporaries, like T.W. Naylor, whose attempts at projecting moving images in 1843 preceded Uchatius by some ten years; a forgotten disquisition on the morality of magic lanterns, originally published in 1772 in the form of a British pastoral dialogue; and the neglected work of Patrice d'Arcy and Segner on the persistence of vision.

And so forth. Here is a source book that should expand and change the way we think and write about the "origins of the movies." It will stand as an important ironic monument to the cinema's centenary celebrations: arguably the most important publication about the "birth of the cinema" demonstrates how anticlimactic and ill-defined 1895 in fact was.

RUSSELL MERRITT

Thompson, Frank, ed. *Henry King, Director: From Silents to 'Scope*. Los Angeles: Directors Guild of America. $16.95. This marvelous book recounts the career of a veteran director whose movie career extends from a 1913 acting debut through 1961's *Tender Is the Night*. Henry King is not in anyone's pantheon, but his work in the silent era includes some of the most exhilerating and profoundly moving films Hollywood produced—*Tol'able David* (1921), *The White Sister* (1923), *Romola* (1925), and *Stella Dallas* (1925). In the sound era, King became a versatile workhorse at Twentieth Century-Fox—"Zanuck had made up his mind that I could direct most anything," King recounts, and Zanuck was right: there were big-budget Westerns (*Jesse James*, 1939; *The Gunfighter*, 1950), biopics (*Lloyds of London*, 1937; *Wilson*, 1943), remakes of silent melodramas (*Ramona*, 1936; *Way Down East*, 1935; *Seventh Heaven*, 1937), and musicals (*State Fair*, 1933; *Carousel* 1956).

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MATTHEW BERNSTEIN

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Russell W. Martin
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Vancouver, WA 98661

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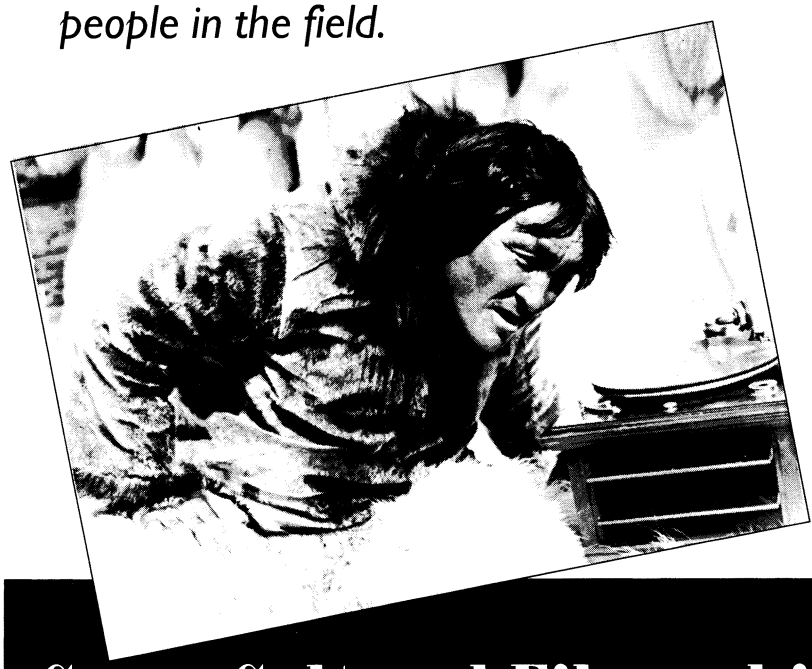

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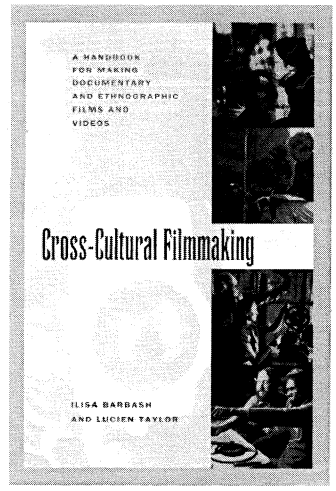


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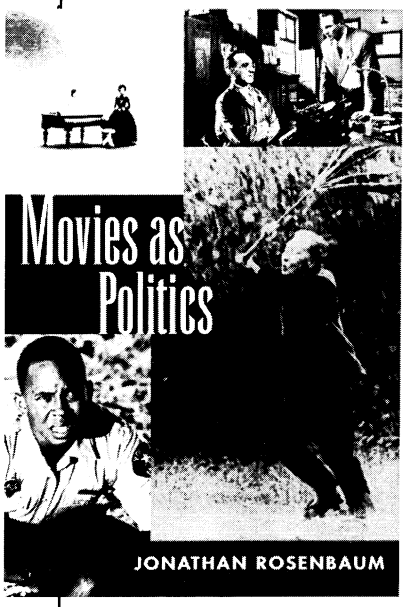


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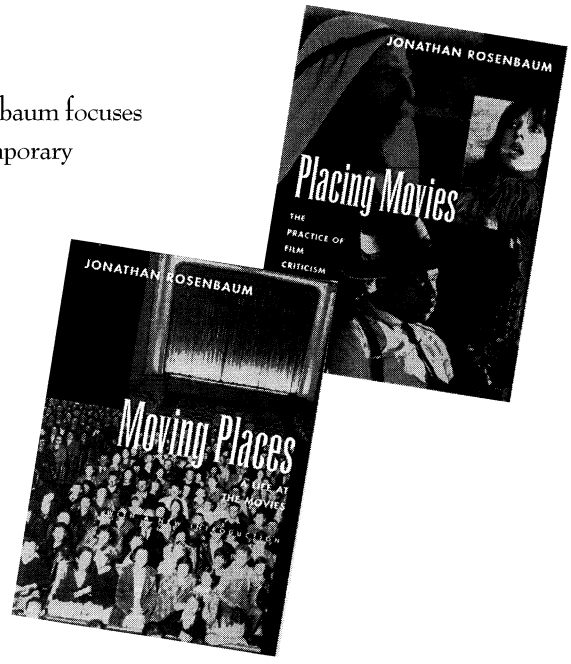


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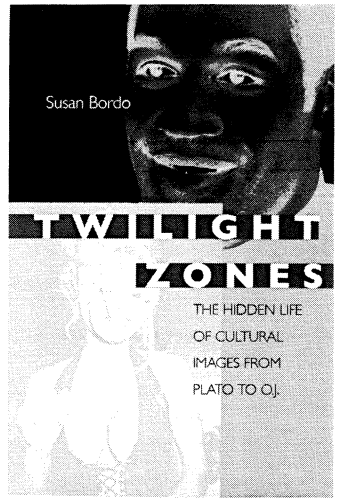


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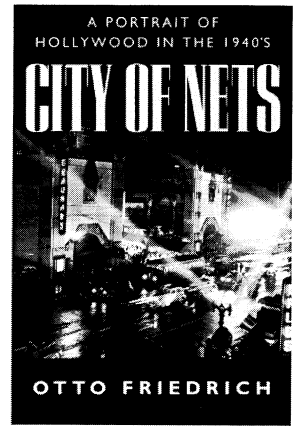


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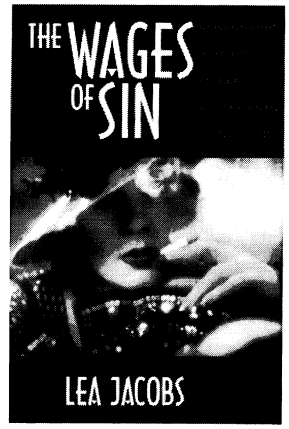


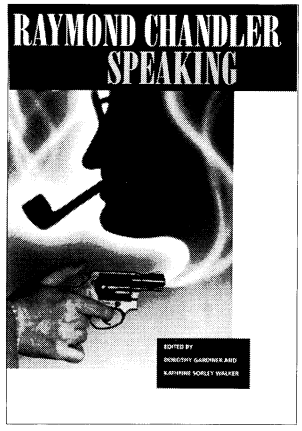


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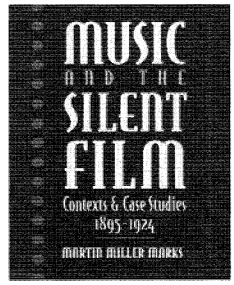


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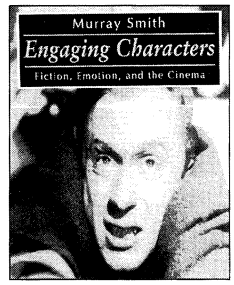


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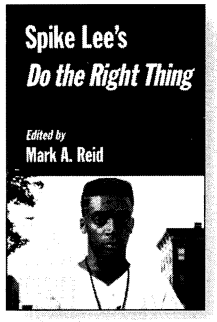


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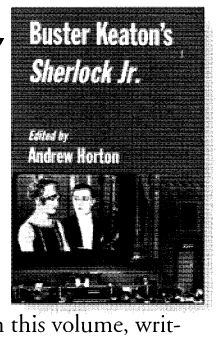


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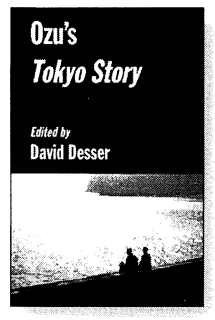


*Tokyo Story* is generally regarded as one of the finest films ever made. Universal in its appeal, it is also considered to be "particularly Japanese." Exploring its universality and cultural specificity, this collection of specially commissioned essays demonstrates the multiple planes on which the film may be appreciated. Among the topics discussed are Ozu's relationship to aspects of Japanese tradition, situating the film within artistic modes, religious systems and beliefs, and socio-cultural and familial formations; and an analysis of how Ozu has been misunderstood in Western criticism.

Contributors: *David Desser, Arthur Nolletti, Jr., Linda C. Ehrlich, Darrell William Davis, Kathe Geist, Hasumi Shigekiho*

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**FACULTY**

David Cook (*A History of Narrative Film*, 1996)
Matthew Bernstein (*Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent*, 1994;
*Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, co-editor, 1997)
Robin Blaetz (*Visions of the Maid: Joan of Arc in Film*, forthcoming)
Angela Dalle Vacche (*The Body in the Mirror*, 1992; *Cinema and Painting*, 1996)

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